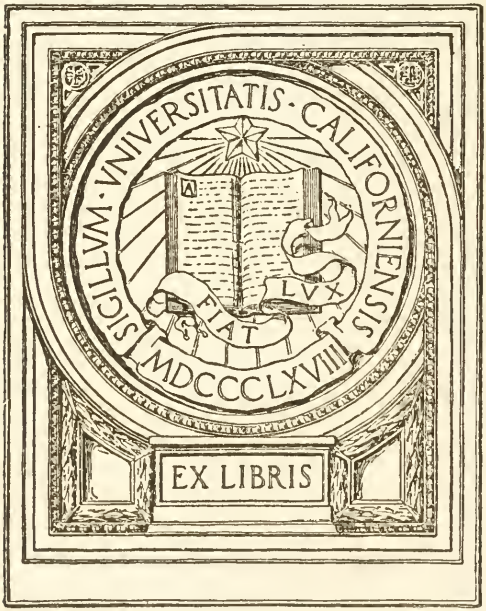
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/willandway02full

A WILL AND A WAY.

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON,

AUTHOR OF

'TOO STRANGE NOT TO BE TRUE,'

'A STORMY LIFE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1881.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	AGAIN AT FONTAINE	1
II.	ALINE AT LES ELMES	46
III.	CASTEL ST. GUY	82
IV.	ALINE AND HER BROTHERS	143
V.	PARCIN'S BARGAIN	178
VI.	THE TABLES TURNED	219

157219

A WILL AND A WAY.

CHAPTER I.

AGAIN AT FONTAINE.

ALONE with the servants and Forêt, Aline felt that nothing called upon her for further effort. The excess of her desolation was almost a relief, mind and body were so exhausted. For two days and two nights she lay perfectly still, in a state between waking and sleeping. If she went quite to sleep, she had fearful dreams; but when awake her state was one almost of stupor. She was spared a great trial. Forêt's wife did not come to the house. Once the

old man opened the door of her room and looked at her with such pity, that she felt touched. He laid the 'Heures de Noailles' on her bed, and went away on tiptoe, thinking she was asleep.

One afternoon a letter was brought to her from Mdme. de Bellecise. She had written it just before her departure, and entrusted it to a friend. It was as follows :

'DEAREST ALINE,

'I have just heard details regarding your beloved aunt's last hours, which will, I am sure, afford you consolation. An acquaintance of ours who was in the same prison with her at the Hôtel de Ville, and at the last moment reprieved and released, at whose intercession he does not know, has just been here. He, like all his companions, was expecting death, and he says that the peaceful resignation, the fervour, even the happiness of those he spent that night with, and especially your aunt's holy cheerfulness, made such an impression upon him, that he felt quite

resigned, and almost regretted when the announcement was made to him of his deliverance. "Alas!" he said, "shall I ever be again so well prepared to die, so willing to leave the earth, as when in the company of such pious persons, and especially of that saintly Mdlle. des Elmes? That prison really seemed to me the house of God and the gate of heaven. No one could describe," he added, "what that night had been—the deep calm, the solemn beauty of that preparation. God had in His mercy ordained that a venerable priest, also condemned to death, should be incarcerated with these good prisoners. Most of them were Christians of long standing; others were reconciled to God during those last hours. The servant of God heard all their confessions, and addressed to them from time to time holy exhortations.

'In the morning they were conducted before the tribunal, and listened to their sentence with perfect calmness. They were to be executed that day. My informant was then

apprised of the order for his release. But from others, my child, I have heard that those who were condemned—and there was but that one exception to the number—walked with a firm step, when the time came, from the Hôtel de Ville, and across the place, to the foot of the guillotine. Your aunt was the first to ascend the scaffold. As the victims passed by him, the priest gave them the last blessing. Like a faithful shepherd, he saw his flock safely over the short, dark passage into eternity, and then he too was executed. Am I not right in thinking, dear Aline, that these details will soften your grief, and lift your soul on high far beyond this miserable world where such horrors are enacted ?'

Later on this letter was indeed to Aline a great consolation, but scarcely so at the moment she received it. Her heart, her feelings, her nerves were all so sore, that it gave her more pain than comfort. A living voice might have instilled consolation into

her soul, but in the solitude, the silence of her days and nights, it only recalled the terrible picture which was ever before her. She tried to pray, to thank God for the mercies shown to her auut ; but if she named her in her prayers, it seemed as if the iron entered into her soul, and the agony was too great to bear. For a little while her benumbed faculties were roused by that letter, but she soon fell back into a state of apathy which began to alarm the servants.

Another day passed in the same dreary hopeless silence. So broken did the spring of thought and action seem, that when Cantat, greatly agitated, announced that a domiciliary visit was impending, and that they were all likely to be arrested, it made apparently no impression upon Aline. She refused to take any steps in consequence, and begged to be left alone.

At about five o'clock that day, Forêt entered her room, followed by a man in a Republican uniform, who, with an imperious gesture, commanded the old man to withdraw,

and closed the door he had left open. Aline started up, and exclaimed :

'M. Alexandre ! Oh, where is my father ?'

Her first idea was that he was dead.

'In Switzerland,' he answered. 'Our first attempt did not succeed. Suspicions were aroused, and we were arrested ; but whilst they were examining our passports, your father bribed with the present of his watch the man in whose custody we were, and he allowed us to escape through the window. Our party dispersed, but M. des Elmes and I made our way back to Fontaine. He started again a short time ago, and we have received notice that he has crossed the frontier and is safe.'

Aline drew a deep breath. It was an immense relief, but her heart was still closed to anything like joy.

'And you, M. Alexandre ?' she said, looking at him inquiringly.

'My short absence had not been remarked, and I was able to resume my official functions ; but yesterday I was denounced, and I came

here to get my passport endorsed before this was known at Lyons. The good Chozières begged me to call and ask if there is anything they can do for you.'

'I want nothing,' Aline answered, in the weary, listless manner from which his presence and his news had for a moment roused her. She paused, and then said: 'My aunt was executed three days ago.'

'Yes,' he answered; 'God only knows how I feel for you!'

She felt he did, and this consciousness melted the hardness of her grief—a flood of burning tears relieved her heart. He suffered her to weep some time, and then said, in a quick, decided manner:

'There is no time to lose. What are you going to do?'

'To await my fate,' she answered. 'I know I shall be arrested, and I don't care.'

'What are you saying, Aline?' For the first time he called her by her Christian name. 'This is wrong.'

'No, it is all the same to me. They

have emptied the prisons and want to fill them again. I have made up my mind to die.'

'You mean to remain here?'

'Yes. I have nowhere to go to—no other desire than to be laid in the grave. I only wish it was already done and over.'

'This must not be. You must come away with me at once. I shall take you to Fontaine—to Madeleine.'

'No, no, leave me to my fate. I want to be in heaven with Aunt Félicie. I have nothing to live for. What does it signify if I die?'

'I shall not allow you to throw your life away. Providence has sent me here in time to save you—and save you I shall.'

'No. M. Alexandre, leave me, and think of your own safety. Why should I live?'

'How would your father and brothers answer that question?'

This appeal overcame Aline. André especially she could not think of without tears.

'Oh, where are they now, my loved ones? My father, Maurice, my darling André! Oh, if they knew what I have suffered! If they had seen me at Marino's feet, or pushed away by Parcin—their little one, as they always called me!'

'Little one,' M. Alexandre gravely and tenderly said; 'little one, be not headstrong and rebellious. I speak to you in your father's name. I am the only person here who has the right to do so. Do you not remember what he said to you the day of our departure?'

'That you had been as a son to him, M. Alexandre. God knows I do not forget it. I would do anything I could to save *your* life, but I cannot do as you wish, I assure you.'

'If I have been as a son to your father, then I am your elder brother, and I command you to follow me. You foolish child! you say you want to die. How do you know that this would happen? Even those monsters shrink from killing children—and you look like a child. You may be exposed to dangers

you cannot understand. You know that your aunt's one anxiety was to keep you out of their hands.'

Aline hid her face in her hands, and made no reply. M. Alexandre waited a moment, and then said :

'Very well, then. I, too, shall remain at Lyons, and in this house ; and I too shall be arrested this night.'

She looked aghast, and answered : 'That must not be !'

Sometimes, in her utter desolation, she had thought of the stranger who in so short a time had become her friend. His image had often passed before her eyes during the last terrible days, as a ray of light in a stormy sky. Now he was there, he was taking an interest in her fate, he was ready to risk his life to save hers ; and she felt suddenly aware that the fancy she had taken to him, that sort of predilection which is not love, but which sometimes leads to it, had changed into a stronger, deeper feeling.

When the broken-hearted, desolate girl,

who had made up her mind to die, heard a friendly voice bidding her live; when she felt a firm will subduing hers, and the man whose gentleness had hitherto been what had most struck her, speaking almost sternly and assuming authority over her, she became conscious of what, under other circumstances, she might not so soon have discovered. Her natural character and all she had gone through had tended to make her independent and self-reliant—now, for the first time, she found a strange sweetness in being governed —in submitting to another. His last argument had given her an excuse for yielding. She rose, and, with a meek feeling in her heart, said:

'I will obey you, M. Alexandre. I have no right to expose you to danger.'

She had just uttered these words when Cantat came into the room. M. Alexandre looked inquiringly at her, and then at Aline.

'She is my aunt's maid, Cantat. She has lived with us a long time.'

'Well, then, get a few things together for

your young mistress,' he said to the maid. 'I am going to take her to a place of safety.'

'It is M. Alexandre,' Aline said; 'a great friend of my father's.'

Cantat looked aghast.

'She must go at once,' M. Alexandre said.

Cantat began to cry. 'Oh dear, dear! what will become of us? They will come here to-night to look for her, and if she is gone we shall suffer for it. Oh, sir, in pity do not take mademoiselle away.'

It would be difficult to describe the astonishment and then the anger of Aline's protector.

'What are you saying?' he exclaimed. 'This child, the niece of your late mistress, is in danger. In a few hours, nay, moments, it may be too late to save her, and you think of nothing but your miserable life, which you ought to be only too happy to sacrifice. But you are not worthy of such a fate.'

Cantat, quite overpowered by these reproaches, left off crying, and filled Aline's little bag. Then Forêt, alarmed at the sound

of a loud voice, came to see what was going on. M. Alexandre did not leave him time to speak, but told him in an authoritative manner that his orders were to take charge of the young Citoyenne Gérard, and exhibited a paper to that effect, which he had himself composed and written.

The old man, always in terror before a Republican officer, bowed and offered no resistance. He even opened the door for them. M. Alexandre took Aline by the hand, and they went out into the street, and then along the same road, at about the same hour as some weeks before, when with Mother Chozière, she had walked from Lyons to Fontaine.

But what a change had come over her since that day! How much older she felt! It did not rain as it had done then. The evening sky was soft and clear, and when it became dark the stars shone, and a gentle breeze waved the branches of the willows on the banks of the river.

Aline leant on her companion's arm, and, weak as she was, did not feel fatigue. He

made her sit down to rest, first on a way-side stone, and afterwards on the trunk of a tree, in one of those lanes which had seemed to her on one occasion so hopelessly long. Now she was in no hurry to arrive. She would have liked that walk to last for ever. She was in that state which inclines people after a great affliction to speak of what they have suffered, to describe what a little later will be perhaps buried alive in their hearts. So she talked much to M. Alexandre of all that had happened since they parted. His sympathy was just what she needed. It was real and deep, but not emotional. They passed by a cemetery; Aline stopped and said:

'M. Alexandre, where will they have buried my aunt?'

He gently pressed her arm and answered: 'Aline' (she was so glad he called her Aline), 'I remember what the angels at the sepulchre said to our Lord's disciples, "Why seek you the living amongst the dead?" Do you not feel sure that He, whose image is on that

cross' (they were close to a mission cross in the churchyard), 'will have said to your aunt when she was mounting the scaffold, "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise"? It is there you must look for her, not where the lifeless corpse lies, but where the immortal spirit exists. Promise me that you will check thoughts which only torture you; that you will be brave and wise, Aline. These are not times in which to waste strength. Who knows what may be required of you in these evil days, when girls not much older than you are have saved others by all but miraculous acts of courage?'

'I shall try always to do what God expects of me, M. Alexandre;' and, kneeling for an instant before the mission cross, she made a mental promise.

When within a short distance of the Maison Chozière, Aline became so faint that she could walk no further. M. Alexandre took her up in his arms, and carried her to the house. The door was opened by Madeleine, who made an exclamation of surprise.

'Yes, here is our little girl;' he said, and added in a whisper, 'broken-hearted at her aunt's execution. She is dead tired, too.'

'Bring her into the kitchen—put her down in the armchair. Dear darling, how pale she looks! Mother, get her some soup.'

Kneeling down before the almost unconscious girl, she chafed her hands, and looked lovingly into her eyes, which seemed hardly able to keep open; but she revived and stretched out her arms to Madeleine. Seeing the tears rolling down her cheeks, she herself burst into a violent fit of weeping.

'That is right,' M. Alexandre said, 'I did not like her not crying.' Then he brought a little table on which Mother Chozière placed a basin of hot soup. 'You must eat,' he said, and, as she shook her head, he added, 'or I shall not eat my supper.'

This made her smile for an instant, but then the words reminded her of Lyons, and she hid her face in her hands. When the meal was finished, Madeleine said:

'Now I must get ready your bed; rest

your head on this pillow, and put your feet near the hot cinders.'

Leaning back in the armchair with none but kind faces round her, for even old Chozière was glad to see her again, a feeling of relief and repose stole over Aline. Pierre had crept into the kitchen, and was sitting in a corner grinning with delight. The Chozières were asking, and M. Alexandre answering, a number of questions. She liked to hear his voice, and listened to what was said until dreams began to mix with what went on around her. She was conscious afterwards of being supported upstairs by Madeleine, and led into the room where Mdlle. de Saurac had died. The remembrance of that memorable night roused her. She perceived that M. Alexandre had accompanied them to the door, and, turning to him, said :

'Thank you very, very much.'

'Good-night,' he said, pressing the hand she held out to him, and disappeared.

Madeleine undressed her, and she was soon fast asleep.

In awaking next morning, both her mind and body felt weary ; but in the midst of grief and weakness there was a thought which made her revert to the events of the preceding day with a thrill of something like joy. When Madeleine brought to her a cup of coffee and a piece of galette, she sat up in bed, and in her pale little face there was an eager expression, as she said :

' Dear Madeleine, I want to get up and go downstairs. Last night I was so drowsy, so stupefied with fatigue, that I hardly thanked M. Alexandre at all for all he did for me. I am longing to tell him how grateful I am. Please let me get up at once, and breakfast in the kitchen.'

' My dear, you had better remain in bed. Our good M. Alexandre is gone. He left us directly after you went to sleep.'

Aline seized Madeleine's hands, and, quivering with emotion, said :

' Is he not coming back at all ?'

'No; he has been denounced, and on no account must he return here.'

'Where is he gone?' Aline asked, with forced composure.

'I do not know; he did not tell us.'

'Then I can neither speak nor write to him.'

'I am afraid not; but you thanked him very nicely last night, though you were so drowsy. I am sure he knows that you are grateful to him.'

'Shall you hear from him?'

'I hardly think so; not, at any rate, whilst things are as they are. Letters bring people into trouble—those who receive, as well as those who write them.'

Aline tried to conceal what she felt. Her state was like that of a person who, in a dark night, has been cheered by a single light, and then sees it suddenly extinguished. She got up and dressed herself, went about the house and then into the garden, as if in a dream. The red and yellow autumnal leaves—so gorgeous and beautiful a short time ago—had

disappeared, and so had the visions the scene recalled. Everything she looked upon gave her pain. Her disappointment was more severe than she could understand, more acute than she could have described. She attributed the intense suffering it caused her, and the bitter tears which it drew from her eyes, to the regret of not having been able to express to her deliverer and friend the unbounded gratitude of her poor little bruised heart. She dwelt on this regret with a morbid persistency. It gave her an excuse for thinking incessantly of M. Alexandre, and for a rebellious discontent that to her immense affliction this peculiar sorrow had been added. She sat on the bench where such happy hours had been spent, closing her eyes not to see the sun shining on the wallflowers, the vistas of the distant plain, the trickling water from the broken arch. She went and came in a listless manner from the garden to the wood, and from the wood to the garden, and when, in the evening, Madeleine asked her if she was coming to the

veillée, she felt as if it was unkind of her to propose it, and said she was too tired. Then changing her mind, she determined to go.

It was a painful ordeal. Everything was so exactly like what it had been before, that it seemed as if the door must open and M. Alexandre walk in, hold out his hand for the book, and sit down near the lamp to read. Oh, if he had spent but one day at Fontaine; if she had had time to ask him who he was and where he was going—and surely, after he had acted a father's part towards her, she would have had the right to do so—how different it would have been! But he had left her with her great grief weighing her down. He had left her alone with strangers—kind indeed, but only lately known. She forgot that he was even more a stranger to her than they were, but she did not think of that. She would have trusted and followed him to the world's end.

Thus she mused, and the tears rolled down her cheeks, whilst Mother Chozière read. The good woman, who saw her weep,

grieved for her. They knew what cause she had for tears, but not how bitter was the drop which made her cup of sorrow overflow.

Aline soon reproached herself for having thought of the Chozières as strangers, for nothing could exceed their tender care of the bereaved and broken-hearted girl. Madeleine loved her as she had loved Mdlle. de Saurac, but in a different way. She had felt for the latter a sort of maternal fondness, but there was between herself and Aline a real sympathy founded on a resemblance of character; both of them had fought the battle of life from a very early age.

Aline's arrival at Fontaine had been spoken of, and domiciliary visits ensued. Once or twice, Madeleine had to take her some distance into the woods, until Driette, mounted on a tree, gave a shrill whistle, which was the signal agreed upon that the coast was clear. On one of these occasions, when alone together in a solitary spot, they spoke with open hearts. Madeleine had discerned something of what was passing in Aline's

mind : the troubled look in her eyes, the restlessness of her movements, a tone of impatience in her voice, indicated another cause of suffering than that of the cruel bereavement she had undergone. Either that was not accepted in a right spirit, or some other inordinate feeling was envenoming the wound. She resolved to probe it, and began by asking Aline if she had got over that animosity against the persons who had caused her misfortune which she had owned to some time before.

'It must be a greater temptation now than ever,' she said, 'after what has happened lately.'

'No, you may think it strange, Madeleine, but I do not hate Aunt Félicie's murderers as I did those who hunted and drove away my father. She was so holy, so wonderfully fit for heaven, so glad at last to die, that, now all that dreadful agony is past, I cannot wish her in this world again. I can think of those men with more pity than anger.'

'And your heart is then at peace? You accept God's will? You thank Him for His mercies, so often disguised under trials?'

'I do not,' Aline said, hiding her face with her hands; and after a pause, as Madeleine remained silent, she impetuously exclaimed, 'I can bear anything but what has happened to me.'

'To what trial are you alluding?'

'I have known one whom I admired and liked—one whom I could have loved . . . . Oh, Madeleine, I think I do love him; and it so happens that, of all persons in the world, this very man risks his life to save mine, and proves to me, a poor forsaken girl, a friend to more than common friendship true; and then, when my heart is bursting with gratitude, I find I never can thank him, never see him, never speak to him again, or hear his voice; that I may live years, a long lifetime, perhaps, and never know who he is, or where he is! You may call it folly—madness—what you please—but it gives me a wish to knock my head against a wall!'

Madeleine sighed.

'I am glad you have told me. This sort of thing locked up in one's secret thoughts does one harm. You will feel the better for speaking of it.'

'It is the not having thanked him I cannot bear. If he had spent the day here, and I had sat with him, as we used to do, in the garden, and told him of my gratitude, and wished him every blessing, and he had said that he hoped we might some day meet again——'

'Oh yes,' Madeleine said, 'we can all arrange, in imagination, crosses that would sit lightly enough upon us. But God's ways are not our ways; and if we cling to those we invent for ourselves, not to the one He assigns to us, we shall never know a moment's peace. In every life almost there is a moment when we have to turn to the right or to the left. God's way is on one side—ours on the other. We have to choose.'

'*I* have no choice to make.'

'Yes, you have to choose between battering

your head against the wall till you get weary of it, and leaving off when you get tired, and have no strength left for anything better, or, by one strong resolve, to enter at once on a path not of your own choosing, shrinking from no duty God sets before you, and pressing forward with that large heart and generous spirit He has given you.'

'That was what you did, Madeleine ?'

Madeleine's face was beautiful at that moment. She looked up for an instant to heaven, and then on the ground, while she held out her hand to Aline.

'I have never seen or heard of him again who for two years had been all in all to me, to whom I owe so much, and yet I now am happy—quite happy.'

'But you thanked him before you parted.'

'If you keep harping on that morbid fancy, you will not have strength to choose the good part. Oh, my dear, do not waste the blessed gifts God has given you in unnecessary regrets !'

'What you say to me, Madeleine, is very

like what he said to me on our way here, when we stood by a wayside cross. I promised him then not to dwell on the thought of where Aunt Félicie is buried, and I made a mental resolution to be brave and helpful to others.'

'Act upon it at once, and look what troubles you in the face. Of two things, one, either this feeling of yours about M. Alexandre is a passing fancy to which gratitude has added strength, and which will, before long, give way to other thoughts and feelings——'

'It is not such a fancy as that. It will not pass away. Do you disbelieve, Madeleine, that one can love deeply, truly, and as long as one lives, somebody whom one has known as short a time as I have known M. Alexandre?'

'It must happen very seldom, I should think; but it must be owned that what he did for you may well have made a deep impression on your heart, and it is not impossible, it may happen that such a feeling may last to

the end of your life. Well, granted it should be so, and suppose you never see him again in this world, what then have you to do ?'

Aline fixed her expressive eyes on Madeleine's face.

'What could I do ?' she asked.

'Well, then, devote to him the life he saved.'

'What do you mean ?'

'I mean what I say. There have been lives thus spent, and there may be again. Become one of those whose prayers God hears, and offer up yours for him. Offer up for him the cheerful surrender of earthly happiness for the sake of an eternal union ; offer up for him the sacrifice of an early death, if God so wills it, or the weariness of a long, unbrightened exile. You may not know where lies his path in this world, or whether he has passed through the valley of the shadow of death before you ; but his helper you will be whether on this or the other side of the grave, if you are faithful to what may prove to be your vocation. God in time will show you if it is.'

It was from the experience of her own heart that Madeleine had spoken. She knew what had braced her soul after a crushing disappointment, and thought Aline needed the same stimulus.

We often read in pious books that people must not talk of themselves, and no doubt, as a rule, this is true ; but, on the other hand, have we not often been helped onward in the warfare of life by others telling us of what they have struggled through—their narrow escapes, their hard-won fights, and the peace they have found on the heights above the storms, heights reached more or less early in the day ?

These words would not have had nearly so much effect on Aline if she had not known the story of her who uttered them, and felt that she was describing what she had gone through herself. Madeleine had spoken on the impulse of the moment, but had been well inspired, as is generally the case when a person's abiding desire is to say and to do

what is right. Her musings as they walked home were as follows :

'There is so little chance of their meeting again, that it would be better perhaps for her to give up thinking of him ; but then, this may not be in her power, and if so, the next best thing must be that these thoughts should lead her upwards—not drag her downwards. Yes, if it comes to the worst, and she never sees him again, good may come out of this sorrow ; and, indeed, for her never to see him again would not be, perhaps, the worst that could happen. She might meet him in after years so changed that her early dream would vanish, or he might be married to some one else, or he might have almost forgotten those days, the memory of which were to her like something sacred. Well, God will settle it as He thinks best. It seems strange that she should care so much for M. Alexandre, whom she did not know a few weeks ago. But then, I have not known her any longer, and I do love little Aline with my whole heart, so I

suppose time has not so much to do with affection as some people suppose.'

Whilst Madeleine was thus cogitating, Aline was also buried in thought—the right chord had been touched. With some characters a new view of a trial sometimes changes its nature. In every kind of suffering there is an imaginative element which, according to the colouring it imparts to it, embitters or soothes the feelings. Pain endured for a definite and great end is immeasurably different from pain endured without an object or a hope. The new idea Madeleine had placed before her, of a life devoted to paying her debt of gratitude, restored to her mind its spring. She began at once acting upon it.

That evening she proposed to read at the veillée, and, with an emotion that had in it more pleasure than pain, held in her hand the book M. Alexandre had so often held.

The villagers said she read better than anyone except M. Alexandre. On the Sunday, Mother Chozière insisted on her acting as reader when a number of the villagers

assembled to join in the prayers of Mass. A crucifix, which she kept concealed in the trunk of a tree, was brought out at that time and placed on a temporary altar. It was touching to see the joy which the sight of it always produced amongst those good people. Even Pierre used to manifest his delight and kiss his hand to it. That poor idiot was a marvel of intuitive goodness, and, what was still more singular, of intuitive prudence—at any rate Providence preserved him from ever endangering anyone.

He and Driette were fast friends. She had undertaken his religious instruction, had contrived to instil into him a reverence for sacred things, an idea of a Superior Being, a love of our Lord and His mother. By dint of effort and pains she had taught him to repeat the 'Our Father' and the 'Hail Mary.' All her ambition was to see him one day able to make a confession and receive our Lord in his heart. She was rather puzzled about one thing—how was Pierre to confess when he never did anything wrong? Mother Chozière

shook her head. She did not believe that Pierre would ever have sense enough to understand about confession, but as he was 'an innocent,' she said, 'he would go to heaven more surely than many others.' Driette, however, did not give up her hopes and efforts.

Amidst these good people in that friendly home, surrounded with love and kindness—for even old Chozière, in spite of himself, was fond of Aline—she spent a peaceful time, and would fain have stayed on, as they wished her to do. She felt more and more reluctant to go to Les Elmes. The only creature there to whom she could look for comfort or society was la Melon, and there were reasons which made her rather dread the companionship of her old nurse. She would have much preferred crossing the frontier to Switzerland, but St. Jean appeared one day and announced that he and Cantat were returning in a few days to Moulins, and very much urged her to go at the same time to Les Elmes. He saw that she was reluctant, and did all in his power to persuade her.

The fact was that they were afraid of appearing at Moulins without her. Reports had reached them that she was about to escape from France, and they ran the risk of being arrested as accomplices of her flight. Strict orders were given by the Municipality for her removal to the Chateau des Elmes, and they had been getting everything ready for her departure and their own. He reminded her of her aunt's wish on the subject, and assured her that her presence in her father's house would be the only means of preserving his property ; that with her sick sister and her nurse she would be as safe as she could be anywhere, whilst in Switzerland she might not find her father or her brother.

'What would she do in a foreign country without friends, or protector ?'

This was all reasonable enough, and Aline felt it to be so ; but Madeleine could not bear the thought of her leaving Fontaine. They shut themselves up in the upper room and talked the matter over.

' Do not go with these people,' she said. ' I

don't like them. Those stories he was telling you about the new difficulties and dangers in crossing the frontier are, I know, untrue, or, at any rate, exaggerated. As long as I thought it better for you to live at Les Elmes, I did not say a word; but since I have seen that man and heard him talk, my mind is changed. Stay with us; we will always love you and take care of you.'

Aline threw her arms round her neck. 'Dear, dear Madeleine, after our talk the other day, and since, I have been thinking a great deal, and I have made one resolution. Do you remember in the life of St. Frances de Chantal, which M. Alexandre read the night before you took me back to Lyons, that it is said she made a vow always to do what was most right—most perfect? None but a saint, I know, ought to make such a vow. But I have made a resolution of that sort, and the keeping of it, please God, will be the lifelong offering of gratitude you spoke of, which will give me peace. Now, Madeleine, I may be mistaken. But I think, though

it would not be wrong to try to get to Switzerland, or to stay with you—though indeed that would be wrong, for here I cannot earn my bread, and I should be living idly on your kind parents' means—it would be most right to go to Les Elmes. Aunt Félicie wished it. "Go," she said, "to your sick sister." I *may* be of use there. Odille may not know me; but I can nurse her if she is ill, or, who knows, do for her what Driette has done for Pierre. Then also I may save the estate for papa, and my brothers. And there is this also, Madeleine—St. Jean and Cantat have been servants in the house ever since I was born. I do not like them, but my aunt did; and it seems as if, in my position, I should pay some attention to their opinion.'

'I should think so too,' Madeleine answered, 'if I thought well of them; but M. Alexandre told us of Cantat's cowardice and selfishness on the night he took you away from Lyons.'

'Madeleine, that is one of the reasons

why I grieve so much that I had not time . . . that now I can never tell him what has since occurred to me about that.'

Aline paused, struggled with herself, and then went on :

'I think we may both have been unjust to her. She had never seen him, you know, or heard of him, and she may have been afraid to let me go with him.'

'But did you not tell her he was a friend of your father's, and that you were well acquainted with him ?'

'Yes ; but for all that, he was wearing a Republican uniform. She may have been frightened, and suspected him.'

'God forbid,' Madeleine said, 'that I should judge or condemn these poor servants! They may mean well, but I wish you could remain with us.'

'So do I, dearest Madeleine ; but I want you to say that I am doing right in going to Les Elmes.'

'Well, I quite understand that you should desire to act on the wish expressed by your

157219

aunt, though perhaps, if she had to choose for you now, she would tell you to stay here. But that you cannot know, and God will bless you for doing what you believe to be right. It may prove a mistake, but not a misfortune. His blessing will be upon it. But this you must promise. If you are in trouble or danger of any sort, communicate with me. I would fetch you away and bring you here. Your father is sure to come back to us sooner or later, or to send us word where he is. I shall find means of letting you know. You can reckon on me, Aline.'

St. Jean was anxiously waiting below for his young mistress's decision. At last she came down, and said she had made up her mind to go to Les Elmes, and would be ready to start on the day he had named.

It was then arranged that she should go to Lyons with him for a few hours, and consult with Mdme. de Souligné as to the means of obtaining a passport. She was received most affectionately by her and Sophie. She heard from them that, as far as they knew, André

was still at the verrerie, but threatening to leave it. The ennui of his life there was becoming, he said, quite intolerable. He was sometimes in Lyons under one disguise or another, and contrived to speak to them. Aline begged them to give him good advice.

'Oh, as to that,' Sophie exclaimed, 'trust me, my dear. I tell him it would be madness to leave a place of safety, and that he must be only too glad that M. Mazurier will keep him. But if he did not make those occasional visits to us, he would soon be off, God knows where. It is some little time since we last saw him.'

Aline sighed, for there was probably some truth in what Sophie said; and yet he ran no doubt great danger by coming into Lyons. It was a choice of evils, and she suspected the young lady of encouraging these dangerous visits.

Meantime, for an assignat of a hundred francs, the passport was procured. Aline was called in it a needlewoman. She slept that night in Sophie's room. When she was

undressing, Mdme. Souligné came in, and saw a bit of red ribbon on her stays, and asked her what it was.

'My father's Cross of St. Louis.'

'My child, you must be out of your mind to have such a thing about you. If you happened to be arrested and searched, it would probably lead to your death. You must let me bury it in the garden.'

Aline's bold spirit rose against this proposal, but she remembered her resolution to do what was most perfect, and submitted to Mdme. Souligné's wish, though it cost her a pang.

Sophie and she sat up part of the night talking of André. It was a great pleasure to hear of her brother, and she could not help feeling fond of the girl who was so fond of him; but all the time she dreaded what might result from an attachment between two such thoughtless beings. She asked Sophie if André had been much overcome by the news of the death of their aunt.

'Oh yes; I saw him the next day. He

had sent me a note in an orange to say where I should find him on the quay, and I went to meet him.'

'Did your mother know of your going?'

'No. I do not bother her about those sort of things; they would make her nervous. I took old Gothon with me. Ah, poor André looked so unhappy. He had been crying all the night. He kept wringing his hands and cursing the judges; and then it was enough to break one's heart, the way in which he said: "And my little one—my little one—my little A. G., what will become of her?" I am so glad I shall have to tell him that I have seen you. We are teaching some pigeons to fly from here to the verrerie and back.'

'Do take care, Sophie—do not do those things out of your own head and without the knowledge of your parents.'

'I am a model of prudence, if you only knew——'

Alice did know, but it was of no use to say more.

In the morning she had to appear before

the Temporary Commission, to have her passport countersigned. There was a little girl of eight years of age waiting there. Aline talked to her, and asked what she had come for.

'The men in there want to examine me,' she said. 'Mamma and sisters and I were taken to prison last week. They would not let me stay with them. Some disagreeable people took care of me. They brought me here this morning, and said that the temporary citoyens wanted to ask me questions—that if I was a good little Republican, and told them what they wanted, they would give me a beautiful doll; but if I did not, they would order me to be punished. I don't care; I shall tell them nothing—no, nothing.'

Aline trembled when the little girl was summoned. She came back in a few minutes, ran up to her new friend, and said:

'They want to know where papa is; I told them I did not know, and if I did I would not tell them. I would not say anything but that; I do not know if I shall be punished.'

Aline looked anxiously at the huissier who

was leading the child. He shook his head, smiled, and said :

'She is going back to her mother and sisters.'

The sight of that room brought back to Aline, with vivid pain, the miserable hours she had spent in it, all her fruitless efforts, all the misery that had followed them. She went through her business with a feeling of indifference, not caring much at that moment what became of her.

The commissioner who countersigned her passport was a former préfet of studies at the College of Moulins. He looked at her fixedly, and then asked :

'How long have you been a needlewoman ?'

'Ever since my mother taught me to sew,' she answered.

Whether he had recognised her or not, he said nothing more, and delivered to her the passport signed.

Before she went away Mdme. Souligné gave her a purse of assignats, and said :

'When the poor prisoners from Moulins

were ordered to execution, they threw into the fire those they had about them, but some of them were found in the grate unconsumed, and brought to us by a good man who thought we might discover some of their relatives. But this is not possible, and as their townswoman you have a better claim to them than we have.'

Aline thought afterwards that this had been an ingenious way of making her a present, and that Mdme. Souligné had taken advantage of the report that assignats had thus been found in one of the prisons, to make her accept that gift. In any case she was grateful for the timely assistance.

For a few days she returned to Fontaine. On the appointed day St. Jean came to fetch her. It was a sad parting with her friends; and the night she spent in Lyons, in her own apartment, a miserable one. When he saw that her passport was duly signed, Forêt did not oppose her departure. He was not sorry, perhaps, that the rightful owner of the property under his care should absent herself.

His wife and his daughter-in-law had appropriated several articles of furniture, much against his will, and he was afraid of the consequences. St. Jean and Cantat, on the strength of Mdlle. des Elmes' last letter, had made efforts to claim what they said she had bequeathed to them, but without success.

It was a relief to Aline, after her sleepless night, to get into the shoemaker's cart which had been hired to take her and her companions to Les Elmes. The journey was not a pleasant one. The vulgar manners of her companions had never struck her so much. They had lost the habits of restraint which used to soften their roughness, and the respect they used to entertain for persons of a higher rank had vanished.

Aline noticed in Cantat's bag some things that had belonged to her aunt.

'She left them to me,' the woman said.

She and St. Jean had literally accepted her bequest. Aline made no remark, and parted with them at the entrance-gate of Les Elmes. They went on to Moulins.

CHAPTER II.

ALINE AT LES ELMES.

ALINE walked up the avenue leading to her father's chateau. The last time she had been at Les Elmes was with Aunt Félicie, three years ago. They had gone there to establish Odille and her devoted attendant in the old nursery where generation after generation of the children of that family had been brought up. This was just before their own departure from Moulins.

Every circumstance of that day was distinctly present to Aline's mind. Her aunt and herself had dined in what was called the summer parlour, a pretty apartment, full of old family pictures. Afterwards they had

strolled about the grounds, gathered a large nosegay, taken leave of poor Odille, and driven away in their comfortable carriage. It was a bitter contrast. Grass was now growing in the court, and the whole place presented a most dismal appearance. Most of the shutters were shut. She rang the door-bell, and presently Babet, a servant-girl she knew, opened the door. Great was her surprise at seeing her young mistress, nor was it unmixed with uneasiness. Every change, every event at that time was apt to disquiet people.

La Melon was in the kitchen, Odille seated in an easy-chair near the window. The former gave a start when she saw Aline, burst into tears, and then folded her in her arms. But the embrace was rather coldly received. The young girl could not get over the remembrance of her nurse's sympathy with the Revolution in its early stages. Fresh from its horrors, and with her heart bleeding from its recent acts, and especially her aunt's death, she almost looked on her nurse as an enemy.

As was said in the first chapter of this

history, la Melon was a woman of more than ordinary abilities and strong feelings, devoted to those she loved, but of an independent turn of mind. Belonging herself to the lower ranks of life, and having witnessed, in a situation she had occupied before she came to Mdme. des Elmes, many an act of tyranny which revolted her, and an insolent pride by no means general amongst the French nobility, but prevalent enough to rouse the indignation of those who came in contact with its manifestations, it is not to be wondered at that a natural spirit of equity, a great love of the poor, and pity for the oppressed should have given her a bias in favour of changes which she was assured would benefit the latter, and elevate the moral tone of the former. She was very religious, and the Gospel seemed to her on the side of those principles which were to make men brethren, and equalise their destinies in this world. Her hopes, her mistakes, her illusions, were shared by thousands more highly educated and as right-hearted as herself. She was devotedly at-

tached to the whole family of the Les Elmes, revered the memory of the countess, who had died in her arms, and honoured the veteran soldier who had survived her ; but still she maintained her own opinions, and would not join in an unmitigated condemnation of the Revolutionary movement.

When the question of emigration arose, and Aline, young as she was, had passionately embraced her brother's ideas and aspirations, la Melon had often irritated her by discouraging prognostics. Her innate good sense and shrewdness led her to disbelieve in the speedy re-establishment of the old state of things, and it almost broke her heart to see the two youths she loved so much leave France, their father, and their home, for the army of the Rhine. André was her special favourite, and when she heard that Aline had encouraged him to emigrate, she lost her self-command, and said :

'You have a great deal to answer for.'

But when the crimes of the Revolution began, and its fatal results became apparent,

no one grieved more deeply or suffered more intensely than la Melon. She shed torrents of tears over the horrors committed in the name of liberty. The judicial murders of the King and the royal family cut her to the heart, and when the news reached her of Mdlle. des Elmes' execution, her hair turned grey during the following night.

But Aline did not know all this. She did not know that this poor woman was more unhappy than even those who, from the first, had deemed the new ideas in themselves wicked and detestable. She remembered that in former days she had defended them, and this made her shrink from speaking to her, or being spoken to by her, of their common sorrows. Hastily turning away from her after the first greeting, she went up to Odille, who was looking more wan and pale than ever. The vacant stare of her eyes, the helpless expression of her face, denoted a nearly complete absence of mind. Still she was pretty—her complexion delicate, her fair hair abundant, her features regular. She

was like a blighted flower, which shows how lovely it would have been if decay had not withered it.

Aline kissed her, but her caresses met with no response. Odille seemed uneasy at perceiving a new person near her, and made a sign that she should go away.

'And is it here I am to live?' Aline thought. Her heart sank within her.

At that moment loud, coarse singing was heard out of doors. The 'Marseillaise' was shouted by a set of men who passed under the window, and entered the house at the front door.

'What is happening?' she asked of Babet, who was standing by her.

'Nothing unusual, mademoiselle. It is the tenant farmers coming to sup here. They do so almost every night.'

'What does this mean?' Aline said, this time addressing la Melon.

'It means, my dear, that they are masters of the chateau. It is under sequestration, and the seals are affixed to all the rooms ex-

cept this kitchen and a garret where we sleep. These men make it their own. They drink the wine; they take the books from the library, and make bonfires with them; they shoot at the pictures. The Committee does not interfere. Their songs and their language are dreadful—you must not go near where they are. Babet will tell you when they go away, but often they stay till late into the night.'

'May I not sleep in my mother's room?'

'Alas! that is impossible. We will make up a bed for you in the garret. There is one other room not sealed up, but it is occupied.'

'Occupied! and by whom?'

'I will explain that to you later. Do not look so very unhappy, my dear. There is a little consolation in store for you. I will put Odille to bed, and in the meantime Babet will get ready your supper.'

'When do you sup?' Aline asked, trying to struggle against her ungracious feelings towards her old nurse.

'At no regular time. Never mind me. Sit down and rest in Odille's chair.'

The invalid had risen, and, supported by her nurse, left the room.

After a while, Babet returned with a little table, on which she placed a coffee-pot, bread and butter, fresh eggs, and a rasher of bacon.

'Thank you,' Aline said, 'but I do not want all that; I am not hungry.'

'But some one else always is,' Babet remarked.

Aline turned rather impatiently to la Melon, who had just re-entered.

'You say there is a room occupied upstairs, and now I see that two chairs are placed at that table. May I ask whom I am going to sup with?'

'A cowherd, who sleeps here.'

Aline jumped up, her eyes flashing fire; the recollection of her nurse's old ideas crossed her mind, but when she looked at her, there was something so sweet in her smile that she could only wonder what it all meant.

'A cowherd you will be glad to see. Here he is.'

The clatter of wooden shoes was heard,

and then a youth, dressed in peasant's clothes, entered the kitchen. Aline looked at him, and then exclaiming, 'André!' threw herself into her brother's arms. It was very delightful, but very bewildering.

'Well, little one, you did not expect to see me here, nor did I think you would come to us. I have been hiding here for some little time. Suspicions were aroused about me at the verrerie, and M. Mazurier advised me to walk off in the night. Where to go was the question. At last I bethought me that la Melon was here, and that the last place where they would look for an émigré was his father's chateau. So here I came. Babet found me employment at a farm up in the hills, with new people who never saw any of us.'

'Oh, but *here* we are in the midst of people who do know us.'

'Not me; I have not been at Les Elmes since I was nine. But now let me have a good look at you, you small creature! I was

actually pining to see again those large eyes of yours.' He played with her hair, and said :

'I suppose no one has taken the liberty of pulling those locks since I had the honour of doing so.'

Aline thought of her aunt's soft, loving hand which had so often gently stroked her hair, and tears stole down her cheeks. André made her sit down on his knees. He kissed away those tears, and said in a low voice full of tenderness :

'Little one, I have been very unhappy about Aunt Félicie, and my poor darling A. G. ; but she knows, does not she, that if I joke and laugh, it is not that I do not feel for her, but that such is my nature. If I am not in the very lowest depths of despair, I must be merry. You must take me as I am, bad bargain as it is.'

He forced her to look at him, and she did so love him, she was so bewitched by his bright smile and playful manner, that her arms were in a minute round his neck and her face hidden in his breast. This meeting was

a bright moment for Aline, but from what she herself saw and heard that evening, and what la Melon told her, she felt the danger of André's remaining where he was. He was, to all intents and purposes, the same spoilt, wayward, and restless being he had always been : everyone's favourite, and keeping everyone in anxiety.

The good nurse watched the two during their supper. It was a sight that cheered her. They still looked like the children she had loved so well : the fair-haired, blooming boy—the dark-eyed, thoughtful little girl of former days ; the funny things he said making her laugh, and her wistful, beseeching look remonstrating with him when he became too wild—too naughty. When, at last, they went to bed, la Melon and Aline conferred privately for some time, and came to the conclusion that the sooner they could get André out of the neighbourhood the better it would be.

This was broached to him the next morning ; and as he was dreadfully bored with his

employment at the farm, he consented to go to Fontaine with a letter to Madeleine, in which Aline entreated her to facilitate his escape. Remembering M. Alexandre's pigeons, she asked Babet to procure a pair of birds and a basket to serve the same purpose. But André scouted the notion of this expedient.

'What nonsense!' he exclaimed. 'How did such an idea come into your head?'

She then told him of how much use this contrivance had been to the Vendean gentleman to whom she owed so much. He began to laugh and joke about her Vendean friend. This she could not bear; laying her hand on his mouth, she said:

'Darling, do not jest on that subject. That good and brave man came to me when I was alone and in despair. But for him, I should be now dead, or in prison.'

Then, in a voice trembling with emotion, she told him all M. Alexandre had done for her.

'He must be a capital fellow,' André ex-

claimed. 'We shall find him out, little one, and thank him till he cries for mercy. I know I am very much obliged to him, for you are almost the only thing I care about in this world. It is a dreadfully disagreeable one just now. I wonder how long all these bothers are going to last. I wish I had been born eighty years ago, or was going to be born fifty years hence. The year 1773 was the worst time possible to make one's appearance on this globe since the days of the deluge. But, grateful as I am to your gallant friend, I am not going to carry about two pigeons with me, just because he found it convenient. Let us eat them for supper.'

'We shall see about that,' she answered, with a faint smile.

He went off to the farm. She wandered about the grounds, feeling lonely and depressed. Not that she disliked solitude. On the contrary, events had latterly so crowded upon her, that it was a relief to be sometimes alone and at leisure to think over them. But every step within and without her old home

was fraught with pain. The sight of the seals which kept her out of the rooms which those ruffians turned upside down at their good pleasure—the traces of their presence, in the shape of broken pipes and vile newspapers lying about in the hall and garden, gave her exquisite pain. She hastened that day into the park to get out of the way of these desecrations, and met in an avenue some men she knew by sight, who had been retainers of her family. They stared at her with insolent curiosity, and she heard one of them say to the others :

'That is the daughter of the ci-devants—the sister of the idiot.'

She turned aside into a path which led into a wood, where every tree and bench reminded her of the past. There was the ash her mother was so fond of ; a little further on, the pond where her brothers used to fish ; near it, a little rustic oratory her mother had made amidst a group of Spanish chestnuts, and in which she said her prayers whilst her children played outside. It was

dismantled, and looked very desolate, but there was still something in it which spoke of peace, if not of hope.

Thence Aline went on to her father's favourite terrace, which commanded an extensive view of arable land and hilly slopes crowned by old trees. No verdure was yet visible. Only in the hedges did a few signs of it appear. Snowdrops here and there reared their heads, forestalling the spring. It was on this eminence that M. des Elmes had one day pointed out to his daughter, then a very little girl, the various chateaux in the neighbourhood, all belonging to neighbours and friends. She remembered that so well. It was on a beautiful day in summer, very unlike the pale wintry one on which she was now gazing on the same scene. Where were they now—the light-hearted owners of those houses, who used to lead such joyous lives, who so little dreamt of the storm about to burst upon them? Dead, or exiles, or living, like herself, on sufferance and in humiliation within the walls which they could

no longer call their own. The view was unchanged, and, though ungilded by sunshine, it was restful to the eye and heart. The whistle of the ploughman, the barking of a dog, the low twitter of the birds, were the only sounds that broke the stillness. Who would have thought that terror and despair were even then reigning over the land, and penetrating into every nook and corner of that once 'plaisant pays de France'? Aline turned back towards the house, and was accosted by the old gardener.

'Come here,' he said, 'and look at your garden. I have always taken care of it. There are no flowers yet. But wait a bit, and you will see what nice crocuses and jonquils you will have.'

To a bruised heart a word of simple kindness is precious. The old man's little speech touched Aline. She thanked him, looked at what had been her garden, and went in. At dusk André came back. Though he persisted in refusing to take the pigeons with him, he was quite willing to depart, and it was agreed

he should do so on the following Tuesday, when his engagement at the farm was to end or be renewed. They all retired to rest.

About four o'clock in the morning, Aline was awoke from a deep slumber by a loud ringing at the door-bell, followed by the sound of voices in the court. La Melon got up, opened the window, and said :

'It is one of the commissioners. I know him by sight.'

She hastened to put on her clothes.

'Get up and dress yourself, my dear. I will go down, but you must be ready to appear if he insists on seeing you.'

She came back looking pale and anxious.

'Simier will not enter the house. You are to come into the court that he may examine you.'

Aline followed her without uttering a word. Halfway down the stairs she stopped, and whispered to la Melon :

'André ?'

'He is fast asleep. I have locked the door and hid the key.'

Aline stood before the little, ugly old man deputed by the commissioners. Simier looked at her as if scrutinising her face.

'Where is your father?'

'I do not know.'

'Where are your brothers?'

'I do not know.'

'Have you seen Précy?'

'No.'

'Were you aware of the wicked designs of his vile party at Lyons?'

'No.'

As these and other questions of the same sort were addressed to her, she happened to glance at the façade of the chateau. To her horror, at a window in the slanting roof, she saw André leaning out and shaking his fist at the party below. Simier's back was to the house, but at any minute he might have turned round and looked towards it. Seizing an instant when he was taking snuff, Aline ventured to raise her eyes again to the window where she had seen her brother. He had now crawled into the gutter, and was

moving along it on all-fours. She turned as pale as death. Simier remarked it, but was not surprised—those men were accustomed to see terror in the faces of their victims. Not able to think of any other questions to put to her, he drew himself up and, in a pompous tone, delivered the following harangue :

'Listen attentively, young citoyenne, to what I am about to say. You have the misfortune of belonging to a family composed of traitors to the nation. You must use all your endeavours to efface this stain, to make reparation for their crimes, and to purify the polluted blood that flows in your veins. Work for the army, for the soldiers of the Republic—that is the proper employment for the daughters of the State—above all, denounce traitors wherever you meet with them. Thus alone can you atone for the guilt of your relatives, and prove yourself a true patriot.'

Having made this speech, he went away. As soon as he was out of sight Aline looked up—André had disappeared. She flew to the top of the house and knocked at his door.

The relief of hearing his voice was immense —he was storming against whoever had locked him in.

'I did not do it,' Aline said, half laughing and half crying; 'but, thank God, nurse thought of doing so. Here she is with the key.'

André rushed out when the door opened, and began to scold la Melon much as he used to do in his childhood when she thwarted him.

'If you had not played me this vile trick, I should have made short work of that old wretch.'

'Do not talk so loud,' Aline said. 'Who knows some one is not listening?'

They at length succeeded in calming the indignant youth, and despatched him to his daily work.

On the following day, Babet, who had been to the village, came into the kitchen with a scared expression of countenance. She ascertained Aline was not there, and then told la Melon what she had just heard from

the miller. His brother-in-law was one of the members of the Committee of Public Safety which held its sittings in M. des Elmes' house at Moulins. They had chosen it on account of its size, and because it belonged to one of the principal aristocrats of the town. From this relative he had heard that when Simier had made a report of his interrogation of Aline, the general opinion was that it would be dangerous to the Republic to allow her to remain at liberty. She was apparently the only member remaining in France of a reactionary family ; she came from the rebellious city of Lyons, where her father had fought with the arch-rebel Précy. Who could tell that she was not in communication with the enemies of the nation and possessed of their secrets ? It had also been suggested that instead of committing her to the prison in which many of her friends and acquaintances were incarcerated, and where she might plot with them, she should be taken to the dépôt. This was the prison where women of abandoned character, and guilty of

horrible crimes, were awaiting execution or undergoing long terms of imprisonment.

It was to such a hell upon earth that the commissioners were preparing to commit Aline des Elmes. The order had not been made out that day, but directions had been given to prepare it against the next sitting.

La Melon made no comment on this communication, but gave Babet instructions about Odille, told her to serve up Aline's dinner as usual, and to say that she was gone to Moulins on business. She walked there, and went straight to the house of one of the commissioners with whom she had been very well acquainted in the days when, as a physician, he attended the count's family. This man, whose name was Lecourt, had frantically embraced the principles of the Revolution, and was a bitter enemy of the nobility, and of the very people with whom he had once been on friendly terms. La Melon had maintained a certain amount of intercourse with him. He remembered that in '89 she had listened with great sympathy and interest to his enthusiastic

dissertations on the changes about to take place in the government of the country, and the new laws enacted for the benefit of the people. When he had announced to her the taking of the Bastille, without any mention, however, of the treachery and cruelty which disgraced that popular movement, she had cried for joy.

These recollections inclined him favourably to the woman of the lower class, with whose present feelings towards the Republic he was not acquainted. He still thought of her as a good patriot. They had not met for some time, except in the streets, on which occasions he always saluted her. She knocked at the door, and asked if M. Lecourt was at home.

'He is,' the servant said, and showed her into his room.

'Well, citoyenne!' he exclaimed, 'this is the first time, I think, that you have honoured me with a visit. Better late than never.'

A few indifferent remarks were exchanged,

one of which led to the mention of Les Elmes. At once he remembered what had taken place at the sitting of the Committee the preceding day, and his brow darkened. He guessed what she was come about, and rose from his chair like a man ill-disposed to prolong an interview. In a constrained manner, he asked what she had to say to him. She answered that a dreadful report had reached her that Aline des Elmes was to be consigned to the dépôt.

'I cannot help it,' he said. 'She cannot go to the town prison, and she cannot be left at liberty.'

'Why not? How can a girl of her age be dangerous to the Republic?'

'It is enough that the Committee think so. Her family are a set of proud aristocrats, who used to humble us by their titles and etiquette. It is a misfortune, but the children of such people must suffer for the sins of their parents. Do *you* still live at Les Elmes?'

'Yes. I take care of the poor invalid girl whom you must recollect. Odille was her

name. You attended her once when she was very ill. Her mother always said that you had saved her life. Do you remember Mdme. des Elmes ?'

Lecourt did not answer. She went on :

'Now she is dead and buried. Were she alive, she would fall at your feet and beseech you to preserve her child from a fate worse than death. Citoyen, have you forgotten the night of her death ? You and I sat by her bedside, and when all was over you whispered to me, "If anyone goes straight to heaven, that woman will."'

'I can never have talked such nonsense,' Lecourt said.

He seemed uneasy, and as if he wished la Melon to go.

'Aline is scarcely sixteen,' she exclaimed, fixing her eyes on him. 'She is small, delicate, and very beautiful. She gave you a kiss one day when she was five years old, because you had cured her mother of a headache.'

Lecourt did remember that little incident.

'Aye,' he said bitterly, 'and her proud father did not like it.'

'Oh, citoyen, will you let that child, whose arms were that day round your neck, be imprisoned with the women of the dépôt? She is as pure as an angel.'

'Purity! angels! Stuff and nonsense! Besides, I really can do nothing. I am only one among many.'

The door opened, and a girl about fourteen came in.

'Papa,' she cried, 'I have been making garlands for the tree of liberty they are going to plant at the Chateau des Elmes. Will you come and look at them?'

La Melon saw the father's eyes glance fondly at his child. She moved towards the door, then stopped, and said:

'Just now you spoke of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children. If you send Aline into that den of infamy, the dépôt, are you not afraid that that child of yours may, one day, meet with the same fate? How many this year have mounted the

scaffold to which they had doomed others? Your turn may come, citoyen, and then your daughter will be a suspect, and her innocence will not save her.'

His love for the girl, who was pulling at his arm, was Lecourt's weak point. A disagreeable sensation ran through his veins.

'But I have no power to decide the fate of that other girl. What can I do?'

'You can plead for her. You can propose to name as gardien the farmer Aubert, who will assume the responsibility of her safekeeping, and produce her whenever the Committee summons her before them. You will do this. I know you will.'

The man looked at his daughter and then at la Melon's agonised face, and said:

'I shall try to obtain it.'

'Thank you,' she said, and withdrew.

'If the worst comes to the worst,' her next thought was, 'and they take her away, I shall insult them and the Republic, so as to be arrested also. Babet would take care of Odille.'

Lecourt did speak in favour of Aline. He pleaded that, considering her youth, there would be no danger in her remaining at Les Elmes, and made an appeal to all who were fathers in the Committee not to send a girl of her age to such a place as the dépôt.

This had its effect, and he was empowered to arrange the matter with the man who farmed the estate, the same whom la Melon had named. On the following day formal notice was given of this decision, and Aubert appointed to the custody of the chateau and Aline des Elmes.

This made very little difference in her position. He was a staunch Republican, but a good sort of man, and relied on the word of honour of her nurse, whom he had known all his life, that she would not leave the place without his knowledge. It was only later on that Aline knew what she had been saved from, or what she owed to la Melon for her prompt action in that matter.

A day or two after these events, Aline, coming home from a stroll in the garden,

observed on a side-table in the kitchen a heap of materials for clothing.

'What are these things for?' she asked.

'Babet went to the office, my dear, and asked for them in your name. They are to be made into shirts and trousers for the troops. You know what Simier said. You will have to make them, and when finished they must be sent to the Committee.'

'Not on any account will I touch them!' Aline exclaimed, flushing up as she spoke.

'You will incur fresh dangers if you don't.'

'Nothing will induce me to work for the Republicans.'

'But what harm is there, my dear, in making clothes for our poor soldiers who are perishing with cold? They are not guilty of the sins of the Government.'

'They are fighting in their behalf; that is enough for me.'

'But, at least, you will not object to making lint for the wounded?'

'No, I will do nothing to aid the Revolu-

tionary army. I shall not touch one of those things.'

All she had gone through, and the tension of her nerves, had made Aline excitable. She pushed aside the working materials and burst into tears. André came in at that moment. He asked what was the matter, and of course commended her resolution. He went further, and trod the materials under his feet.

There is nothing so likely to make sensible persons doubt the propriety of their own actions as the vehement approval of some one whose judgment they distrust. Aline experienced this, and felt rather uncomfortable, but tried to dismiss the subject from her mind. She was anxious about André. He had changed his mind, and refused now to go to Fontaine—neither would he tell her what he intended to do. She suspected that his intention was to return to Lyons. He denied it, adding, however, that to hide in a large town was easier than to wander about the country. He had received a note, he said, from M. Mazurier, who as-

sured him that the danger at the verrerie had blown over, the man who was supposed to be a spy having departed, and that he could return without fear. This was all very well, but Aline thought Sophie had something to do with this change of plans.

She was lying awake one night, occupied with these thoughts, when by the light of the lamp always kept burning at night on Odille's account, who often wanted to drink, she saw her nurse working by the side of it. The village clock struck two, and then three, and still la Melon worked. Aline got out of bed, crossed the room, and stood before her. The good woman looked up, pointed to Odille, and, putting her finger on her lips, made a sign that she should go back to her bed. But Aline had seen what she was doing. She was making one of the soldiers' shirts. It flashed upon her that whilst she had been obstinately refusing to ward off danger from herself, this devoted friend, after her day of fatigue and anxiety, spent her night in work to screen her from reproach.

A pile of clothes was lying behind Odille's bed.

When they met in the morning, Aline threw her arms round la Melon's neck, and said :

'Nurse, I give in ; promise me that you will never again sit up at night at this work, and I will do it. You were going, I suppose, to send it back in my name ?'

'I never meant you to know anything about it, my dear.'

It was now no effort to Aline to take up the distasteful work. She wondered at having so soon forgotten her resolution to do what was most perfect. In truth, it is one not easily kept, but she renewed it with all the fervour of her soul. It was now her nurse's business to restrain her zeal. At every stitch she drew, the words, 'Offered up for *him*,' rose in her mind. She had made for herself a system of prayer which helped her through the day. It combined, as it were, every suffering, every effort, every joy—for joys are always to be found even in

very sad and anxious lives — with some petition for M. Alexandre. She was thus paying her debt of gratitude from morning to night. This practice associated him with all her thoughts. It became part and parcel of her existence, and a companionship in her solitude.

These days at Les Elmes would have been peaceful enough, had it not been for the constant intrusion of ill-disposed neighbours, chiefly farmers living in the dependencies of the chateau. They were making rapid fortunes, and spending them equally fast. Scarcely any of them transmitted their wealth to the next generation; but whilst this good time lasted, the newly enriched peasants led luxurious lives. They gave dinners at the chateau, and often their noisy and licentious songs, their brawls and shouts, disturbed the silence of the night.

The assignats Aline had brought with her were rapidly diminishing, so she divided her time between the work for the army and embroidery which Babet sold to some of the

neighbouring farmers' wives. It was chiefly in kind that they paid for it, and for the children's clothes, frocks and caps, which la Melon made. Butter, milk, eggs, cheeses, and sometimes fowls, they thus obtained. Once a week they bought butcher's meat, the old gardener gave them vegetables, the miller flour, which Babet baked, and thus they lived.

André returned to the verrerie, and though his presence had been a constant source of anxiety, his departure was a sorrow. The days that followed were tranquil enough, Aline sewed and embroidered indefatigably. She used to sit by Odille's couch, and to sing to her for hours together. It was the only thing that seemed to give any pleasure to the poor invalid, and this discovery was a joy to Aline.

One day it was announced that a tree of liberty was going to be planted in front of the chateau. La Melon had been expecting this, but had said nothing till it was actually brought to the door, and notice given that the ceremony would take place on the follow-

ing Sunday. Although the Republic had abolished the Lord's day, old habit often induced its adherents to choose it for their festivals. A red cap had been brought with the tree. La Melon hid it, afraid that Aline might lay violent hands on the Revolutionary emblem. She was anxious to know what she would do on the day of the ceremony.

'My dear,' she said at last, 'have you heard that they are going to erect here a tree of liberty ?'

'It does not concern me,' Aline answered. 'I shall keep out of the way.'

'Only——'

'Only what, nurse ?'

'Only I am afraid they will expect——'

'What can they expect ?'

'I fear they will call upon you to join them, and to dance round the tree.'

'They may drag me to the spot, but force only would ever compel me to be present, much less to degrade myself by taking part in their orgies—no, not to save my life. I would much rather die.'

La Melon thought of the dépôt, and her heart sank within her.

'Before they murdered Aunt Félicie there was nothing I would not have done to save *her* life—kissed the tree of liberty—*anything* they chose; but, as regards myself, rather than join in their disgusting festivities, I would willingly die.'

La Melon was in despair; but, to her inexpressible relief, she heard the next day that the hateful ceremony was put off for a fortnight.

This was a reprieve; and it so happened that before the appointed time an unexpected change took place in Aline's position, which, at any rate, solved the difficulty, for it removed her from Les Elmes.

CHAPTER III.

CASTEL ST. GUY.

ELINE was surprised one morning—disagreeably, of course, for at that time such an announcement was always more or less alarming—at hearing that a stranger wished to speak to her, a person of the name of Vaubon. She begged la Melon to see him and find out what he wanted with her. In a few moments the good woman came back to her, looking greatly excited.

'My dear,' she said, 'do you remember—I do—hearing M. le Comte speak of an aged cousin of his, Mdlle. de Marsoulier?'

'Yes,' Aline answered, 'of course I do. She must be very old indeed now.'

'Well, she has sent her agent—his name is Vaubon—with a letter to you. He would not tell me all he has to say. You had better speak to him.'

'I will; but you must come with me. Has he a good countenance?'

La Melon shrugged her shoulders.

'If a fox can have a good countenance, I should say yes.'

The moment Aline saw the person in question she was struck with the accuracy of that remark. He was a middle-aged man, with a reddish face, grey hair, small piercing eyes, a sharp nose, and an expression of cunning in his countenance, which was, however, tempered with kindliness. He bowed to her, and explained the purport of his visit.

Mdlle. de Marsoulier, whose affairs he was entrusted with, had heard, he said, with the deepest concern of the death of Mdlle. des Elmes; and finding that M. des Elmes had

left France, and his daughter was alone and unprotected, she wished to invite her to her house, and had directed him to treat with the municipal authorities at Moulins, and obtain their permission to remove her to Castel St. Guy, provided the young lady herself was disposed to accept this offer of a home. He had accordingly called on one of the members of the Committee whom he was acquainted with, and begged him to present to his colleagues a petition from the Citoyenne Marsoulier, praying that, on account of her advanced age, her loneliness, and her infirmities, she might be allowed the society of her great-niece, who was also living alone, and under surveillance, at her father's chateau. His friend agreed to lay the petition before the Committee, which opined that the elder sister should be sent to this aunt. He—Vaubon—replied that the state of health of that young person made this impossible. The Citoyenne Marsoulier was more than eighty years of age, and it was out of the question that she could take charge of a

helpless invalid. After three days' discussion leave was finally given for Aline's removal to Castel St. Guy, where she was to be under the guardianship of the local municipality, but on condition that Vaubon should hold himself responsible for her return to Moulins whenever the Revolutionary Committee chose to order it.

Aline was surprised, a little agitated, but, on the whole, thankful for this arrangement. She knew very little indeed about Mdlle. de Marsoulier, except that she was considered eccentric. In former days, her parents, she remembered, used to pay her occasional visits. It was one of her earliest childish recollections, that she saw them drive off one day with an immense nosegay of flowers in the carriage, and that her mother said they were going to Nevers to see Mdlle. de Marsoulier. When they came back she heard them talking of her peculiarities, and that she would not hear or believe that anything was different from what she had known in the days of Louis XV., the whole of whose reign she could remember.

Of late years she had heard nothing of the old lady. It was a plunge in the dark to go and live under her roof, and in complete dependence upon her generosity; but still a change she felt, of any kind almost, would be for the better, and the protection of an aunt invaluable in her orphan condition. And then visions rose before her—for young people are always sanguine—of all sorts of possibilities which might make life happier, or at any rate less hard, than she had found it of late.

But even in what we are glad of, there is often a mixture of sadness. There was sorrow at leaving the place of her birth; her good nurse, whom she had learnt to value and respect as much as she had always loved her; poor Odille, too, who cared for no one, and to whom she could be of little use, but who still had a claim on her affection. But it was clearly best for all that she should accept the proffered kindness of her aged relative.

To la Melon the relief was inexpressible. Ever since the threat of the dépôt she had scarcely had an hour's peace, and during the

last few days had been in terror as to what would happen on the day of the planting of the tree of liberty.

There was no time to lose in making arrangements for Aline's departure. Vaubon was to fetch her the following day. She had but few things to pack up. That afternoon she wandered about the neglected grounds and amongst the tall trees of the park, wondering if ever, and under what circumstances, she would see Les Elmes again.

St. Jean and Cantat had heard of the change in her destination, and they came to wish her good-bye. They brought with them a little companion whom Aline welcomed with an amount of joy she was almost ashamed of. This was a little spaniel called Coquette, who had been for some years her pet, which her parents, her aunt, her brothers, had all played with and caressed, who, when she used to return to her desolate lodgings at Lyons, had cheered her by its demonstrations of affection. During the days that had followed Mdlle. des Elmes' execution, when she

was lying in a state of stupor, the little creature had been stolen, and if her mind had not been utterly engrossed by her absorbing affliction, she would have felt it very much. It had got away from those who had taken it, and was found in the streets by an acquaintance of Cantat's, who sent it to Moulins.

Since her sorrows, Aline had hardly known a moment of such pleasure as when Coquette made her appearance, and going, as she was, amongst utter strangers, it seemed like taking a friend with her. She thanked St. Jean and Cantat for having brought her the little dog, and took a kind leave of them.

Vaubon arrived early next day. He had found it impossible to hire a carriage, or even a cart, so he proposed that Aline should ride his mare, which was very quiet, and he would walk until he could make, on the way, some other arrangement. The distance between Les Elmes and Castel St. Guy was about thirty miles; they were to sleep at a small inn on the road. When the moment of de-

parture came, Aline threw her arms round la Melon's neck, and said :

'Oh, nurse! I was very unhappy when I said good-bye to Madeleine, but to leave you is worse. I love you both for what you are, but you also for what you have ever been to us.'

Then she kissed the unconscious Odille, bade farewell to Babet and the old gardener, and walked down the steps with her bag in her hand and Coquette in her arms. When Vaubon saw the spaniel he shook his head, and said :

'Mdlle. de Marsoulier does not like dogs.'

'My aunt was so fond of it,' Aline pleaded. 'I cannot part with Coquette.'

He said nothing more, and Coquette ran frisking and barking alongside the steady old mare.

At the small town on the Loire where they slept, Vaubon procured a horse. He told Aline that the one she was riding went by the name of 'the niece's mare,' because it was the one always sent to convey

her young relatives to Mdlle. Marsoulier's house.

'So there are other nieces besides myself.' This was good news to Aline.

There is no time like travelling for musings, and this journey, reminding her, as it did, of the one she had made under M. Alexandre's protection, carried back her thoughts to those hours so indelibly fixed in her memory, and also into a future the very vagueness of which gave scope for those fanciful imaginings, and that conjuring up of scenes connected with their hopes and wishes, which the young love to indulge in.

Aline's more immediate previsions related to Mdlle. de Marsoulier's appearance and the manner of her reception. She pictured to herself her father's cousin as a venerable, benignant, old-fashioned lady, with great remains of beauty, and something stately about her which would be imposing at first, but not really formidable. She asked Vaubon a few questions as to her unknown aunt's tastes and habits, and the mode of life she

led; but he was not at all communicative, and she was obliged to fall back on her own imagination.

'How odd it is,' she said to herself, 'that I, who went through such terrible moments so calmly, should actually feel frightened at having to face an aged relative, whom I have every reason to suppose feels kindly towards me. My heart beats at this moment more than it did when Simier came to cross-question me the other day.'

The fact is, that, in the presence of a great emergency and real dangers, people do not, as a rule, suffer from nervousness. But the traces of such moments remain. The heart is bruised, the mind overwrought, and circumstances are apt to agitate and disturb them in a disproportionate manner. Aline, so calm and self-possessed before the ruthless agents of the Republic, trembled as she dismounted at the door of Castel St. Guy, and then followed Vaubon, who led the way to Mdlle. de Marsoulier's dressing-room.

They found her sitting in a low chair, and

her maid frizzling a slender knot of grey hair at the back of her head. The moment was not a favourable one for the personal appearance of the good lady. Her forehead was wide, her eyes round and prominent, her nose red. She had thick arms and hands, and a short, stout figure. In a shrill voice, she said :

'How do you do, Mdlle. des Elmes ?' and then asked a number of questions, which she scarcely gave her time to answer.

Meanwhile, a scuffle was heard outside the room, the door of which was not quite closed. In the agitation of her arrival, Aline had forgotten her dog. To her horror, Coquette, escaping from some one who was trying to stop her, made a sudden rush into the apartment, and in her wet and dirty condition met the astonished sight of Mdlle. de Marsoulier.

'Turn that dog out !' she cried.

'It belongs, I think, to Mdlle. des Elmes,' the maid remarked.

Aline nodded assent, scarcely daring to

utter. But when, in a softened tone, Mdlle. de Marsoulier said :

'Oh, in that case, leave it alone.'

She found courage to apologise for Coquette's appearance, to explain the reason of her attachment to the little creature, and to promise, if it might stay with her, she would take care to keep it out of sight.

'You need not do that,' Mdlle. de Marsoulier answered. 'Bring it to my apartments when you come to see me. I shall like it.'

This was an unexpected invitation, and Aline's spirits rose a little.

When at dinner-time Vaubon saw Coquette lying before the fire, and the good old lady patting it on the head, his astonishment was great.

The room Aline occupied was called 'the niece's apartment.' It was in a pavilion detached from the rest of the building. To reach it, the courtyard had to be crossed. No one else slept there. She was asked if she was afraid of being alone. She said no, with-

out feeling quite sure that she was speaking the truth.

When the servant who had conducted her to this secluded chamber departed, the feeling of solitude was rather overpowering. To shake it off, she inspected her room. The walls were whitewashed, the bed adorned with grey curtains, bordered with blue satin stripes, and a blue chintz counterpane. The rest of the furniture consisted of a large armchair of yellow Utrecht velvet, a straw chair, a small table, a washing-stand, and shelves on which were ranged eighteen volumes of the 'History of China.' The profound silence which reigned around her, instead of favouring sleep, seemed to make Aline wakeful. She only slept at intervals, and missed the sound of the cock-crowing which had been so familiar to her at Fontaine and Les Elmes. In the morning she saw that her window looked on the road, a very unfrequented one, except by a few peasants, and that only on market-days.

At nine o'clock, a servant came to say that Mdlle. de Marsoulier was expecting her.

She was received very graciously, and invited to breakfast.

'Mdlle. des Elmes, as I am your aunt à la mode de Bretagne, I beg that you will in future call me your aunt.'

This was kind, but to give that name to one so unlike the aunt she had so worshipped was an effort. However, it had to be done, and she expressed gratitude for the permission.

She was wondering, meanwhile, what the lady's-maid was about at the open window, through which a cold wind was blowing rather painfully, and where she was making a variety of peculiar sounds. The mystery was soon solved by the appearance of a number of cats, who came out of every corner of the court, and took their share of the meal. It was by degrees, through personal observation, and also from the servants, that Aline discovered the eccentricities of the old lady.

At eleven o'clock, the dinner-bell rang. Taken by surprise, for she had been told the dinner-hour was at twelve, she hastened to

the dining-room, where Mdlle. de Marsoulier was already seated. She apologised, and timidly said that she must have mistaken the hour. She saw that Vaubon was trying not to smile. Meeting him in the passage in the afternoon, she asked him which of the clocks in the house went right, so that she might not be again unpunctual at meals.

'They none of them go at all,' he said; 'not even the kitchen clock. Mademoiselle de Marsoulier's own watch is the only timepiece here.'

The fact was that the mistress of the house had an inordinate appetite, and could never wait patiently for her meals. In order to hasten the dinner-hour, she used to advance her watch, and, with it in her hand, walk into the kitchen, and reproach the cook for her inexactitude. The sound of her high-heeled shoes, and of her gold-headed cane striking the floor, gave warning of her appearance. One day the kitchen clock was found to be stopped, and, one after another, all the other clocks in the house. When the servants pro-

posed to send for the watchmaker, Mdlle. de Marsoulier forbade their being touched. She said the sound of their ticking and striking was fatiguing. Thus she and her watch remained sole arbiters of time at Castel St. Guy. With Vaubon's watch she could not meddle. He kept it discreetly in the background, and took care never to appeal to it in disputed cases.

When Aline made her excuses that first day, Mdlle. de Marsoulier replied:

'Mdlle. des Elmes, punctuality has been called the politeness of kings. I recommend it to your attention, though nothing royal is in fashion just now, I am told.'

After dinner, Aline accompanied her aunt to the drawing-room, and was told to sit down in an armchair opposite to her—there she was to remain till four o'clock. During that time the curé of the village paid his daily visit. This proved one of the most disagreeable features of Aline's residence at Castel St. Guy. He was one of the Constitutional priests, which in itself would have predisposed

her against him ; and nothing in his manner and conversation tended to inspire her with respect or confidence. He was, however, in great favour with Mdlle. de Marsoulier. She was one of those women who had imbibed so-called philosophical opinions in her youth, and, though not exactly an infidel, cared very little for religion. She saw no reason, she said, to quarrel with the Abbé Brumais, who had been her constant visitor for fifty years, and abused the Revolution, and praised the ancien régime as cordially as anyone could desire, only because he had taken a foolish oath, which meant nothing at all. She had always been his benefactress, and so she continued to be.

Aline saw how matters stood, and was very distant, though civil, in her manner to him. As he was leaving, he turned to her and said :

'Mdlle. de Marsoulier's health does not permit her to come to church. I hope that on Sundays Mdlle. des Elmes will occupy her seat in the chancel.'

Aline coloured, and answered :

' Thank you, sir ; neither shall I go to your church.'

The abbé was taken aback, for he saw by her countenance what her words meant. He did not say anything more, nor did Mdlle. de Marsoulier make any remark on what had passed.

After he had gone, she and Aline conversed. When in a good humour the old lady was very agreeable, and her reminiscences of the olden days at court, her description of the people she had known, and the salons she had frequented, were well worth listening to.

There is no epoch about which people are so ignorant as that immediately preceding their own entrance on the scene of life. It has not yet become a matter of history, and it is only by conversing with elderly persons that a knowledge of it can be gained. Then she was called upon to relate her own adventures, and the time passed quickly. This was not always the case. Mdlle. de Marsoulier sometimes dozed during the hours

supposed to be devoted to conversation, but Aline was expected to remain in her arm-chair, whether this happened or not ; and if her aunt awoke and found that her companion had fallen asleep, she was by no means pleased. Supper was at seven. The doctors who attended Mdlle. de Marsoulier, alarmed by her immense appetite and increasing size, had forbidden her to indulge in that meal. She so far complied with their orders as not to come to the dining-room, but such substantial compensatious were carried to her on a tray that they fully made up for the sacrifice.

Aline and Vaubon supped *tête-à-tête*, and when the meal was over she had again to keep her aunt company whilst her maid went down to supper. One of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's fancies was to have no other light in her room than that of a blazing fire, which she never dispensed with even in the dog-days. Aline tried to keep awake by dint of spinning, but this did not always succeed.

After she had been a few days at Castel

St. Guy, what most puzzled her was the absence of anything like fear or danger—the complete security which its inmates seemed to enjoy in the midst of the reign of terror. She could hardly realise that it was still going on, and though there was repose in this freedom from alarm, she felt a restless desire to hear what was taking place in a world to which this antiquated spot seemed scarcely to belong.

Mdlle. de Marsoulier ignored the Revolution, but if anything relating to it was forced upon her, then her exasperation knew no bounds. She refused to believe that it had gained the upper hand, and that France was quivering under its bloody hand. It was easy to see that had she been brought into contact with its promoters, she would never have controlled herself, and would have spoken her mind to the Sans Culottes, in no measured language, even had she been on her way to the scaffold. That she should live perfectly unmolested seemed a miracle.

Aline ventured to ask Vaubon, during one of their *tête-à-tête* suppers, to explain to her this mystery. He smiled in his peculiar manner, and said :

'It is very simple. Since the troubles began I have secluded her almost entirely. The servants are faithful, and obey my orders. No one is allowed to approach her without my sanction except old friends, such as M. le Curé, M. l'Espinasse and his son, and a few others. I assure you that a prisoner of state is not more closely watched.'

'How long has she lived here ?'

'About five years now. She used to inhabit Nevers, where she has a large house. Ten years ago she began to rebuild this chateau. What now exists is only a portion of the original plan. When things began to assume a threatening aspect, I persuaded her to come here and see, with her own eyes, how the building was progressing. I was very anxious to get her away from Nevers, where she was in daily danger of committing herself by imprudent language. I knew

what was coming, and that the temper of the people there would be easily roused, so I advised her to furnish for herself an apartment in the wing which was finished, and to add to it offices, out-buildings, and the little pavilion you now inhabit. She consented to do so, and permanently to take up her abode here. Few people knew that she had purchased this estate, and was building a house, so her residence here has escaped observation. At first she often threatened to return to her town house. Last year she spoke of it seriously, but fortunately just at that moment the Revolutionary Committee at Nevers took possession of her hotel, and held their sittings in it. She went into a violent passion, and declared she would go, and with her cane drive the villains out of it with a shower of good blows ; but as the villains did not hear her, it did not signify. Since then she does not talk of moving.'

Vaubon might have added that he had played his part very cleverly. He had the reputation of being a staunch Republican,

and indeed was connected by marriage with some of the most violent of the Jacobins. He had the whole management of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's estates, and, without any actual dishonesty, contrived to make his agency a source of profit to himself. It was, therefore, his interest as well as his duty to watch over her safety.

Aline soon found out that Mdlle. de Marsoulier had her good and her bad days, and learnt to watch the indications of stormy weather by certain preliminary indications. The earliest token of a storm was the shuffling sound of her slippers in the passage, which she was every minute losing, and the raps of her cane on the floor. She collected with it stray bits of wood, and kept exclaiming:

'Good heavens, what waste! there is fuel enough here to last a week! I have always said so. These people will ruin me; they will bring me to beggary.'

Everyone got out of her way on these occasions, and when, panting and breathless,

she arrived in the kitchen, again her voice was heard :

'What a fire ! Enough to roast an ox !'

And then the blazing logs were pulled out, the ashes scattered about. This naturally increased the heat of the temperature, and also that of the old lady's temper ; and when Nannette, the cook, at last appeared, rather sharp words were exchanged between her and her mistress, followed by a long discussion about dinner.

Aline sometimes received one of these matutinal visits, and was scolded for leaving her things about, which was hard considering she had no place to put them in except a small writing-table drawer.

The days thus ushered in were generally in keeping with the morning's promise. But others were very different. When not under the influence of irritation—partly caused by bad health and sleepless nights—Mdlle. de Marsoulier was kind and good-natured, and, in spite of her economical paroxisms, a very generous person, always willing to do a

charitable action. But, like most of those spoilt by self-indulgence, and a long habit of always having their own way, she had no consideration for others, no perception of their discomforts, no measure by which to test their feelings. No one was to suffer from what did not cause her suffering, no one to care for what she did not care about. For instance, after Aline had been a short time at Castel St. Guy she had a violent toothache, and asked her aunt to let her send for a dentist.

'A toothache!' Mdlle. de Marsoulier exclaimed. 'Why have you got a toothache? I have never had one. It is all nonsense. I do not approve of people having their teeth pulled out.'

Aline made her way to the nearest dentist, and secretly got rid of her enemy. She said nothing when Mdlle. de Marsoulier triumphantly remarked the following day:

'I told you not to think about it, and you see I was right. Dentists are the most useless people in the world.'

The days were very like one another at Castel St. Guy. One afternoon, however, was marked by an incident which might have had serious consequences. Mdlle. de Marsoulier was in high good-humour, and relating to Aline stories of her youth, which interested her exceedingly. The pleasure she took in them pleased her aunt, and agreeable hours to both were thus spent by the fireside in the semi-darkness of the little old-fashioned room.

'Ah, you like my stories, Mdlle. des Elmes, she used to say; 'I see you open your eyes wide when I begin with those words, "When I was a little girl."'

'Oh yes, dear aunt; and you must tell me to-day something you did or heard in your childhood.'

'Well, I think I have arrived at the end of my stories.'

'I am sure you can think of another if you try.'

'Let me see. Oh, there was a curious fact which came back to my mind the other day.

My grandmother was staying with us at Nevers when I was quite a little girl, and asked my father to let her take me back with her to Paris. I spent some months at her house. She was very fond of me, and wherever she went I always went too. She used to pay visits to an old nun at Chaillot, and they held long conversations which bored me very much. However, one day the old nun said, "When I was a little girl," which made me perk up my ears as you do, Mdlle. des Elmes, and I listened to what she was saying. It was this: that Queen Catherine of Medicis, who was exceedingly superstitious it seems, one day made the wheel of Fortune turn, in order to find out how long the successors of her sons would reign. Very long it turned for Louis XIII., which made her sigh with envy. Then so long for Louis XIV., that she exclaimed, "Would I had lived then instead of now!" Again she renewed that wish as the wheel kept spinning on for Louis XV. When the turn of Louis XVI. came, after one or two turns it stopped——'

As Mdlle. de Marsoulier was thus relating and Aline listening, the door opened, and Babet, the lady's-maid, came in, and said that one of the peasants wished to speak to her.

'Tell him,' her mistress said, 'to go to M. Vaubon.'

'He is not at home. He said he should not come in till six.'

'Well, show the man in. I suppose he wants some assistance.'

The man came in.

'I don't know this fellow,' Mdlle. de Marsoulier whispered to her niece. 'Well, my friend, what do you want?'

No answer, but some humming and hawing.

'Well, I am come—you see, because we are told——'

'What?' in a sharp tone.

'That now we have our rights—I mean, that we have the right . . . by the new state of things—the rights of man—they say——'

'Please to come to the point,' Mdlle. de Marsoulier said, with increasing impatience, 'or I shall exercise the right of ordering you to leave the room. What is your business? Do you want an alms?'

'Oh dear no! Everybody is equal now, and what I want is to put you in requisition.'*

'Put me in requisition! And what the devil does that mean?'

Mdlle. de Marsoulier, when excited, was apt to use strong expressions.

The visitor stuttered, hesitated, looked rather frightened, and at last got out the words:

'Well, it means that you are to marry me!'

In one moment Mdlle. de Marsoulier was on her feet, and her gold-headed cane swinging round the head and falling on the shoulders of her suitor with an astonishing vigour.

* That was, in the language of the Revolution, to require a woman of fortune, whether willing or not, to bestow her hand on a good patriot.

Taken by surprise, he backed towards the door, trying to evade the shower of blows, and ejaculating :

'But, citoyenne, I had been told——'

'Oh, I am a citoyenne, am I ?' the infuriated old lady screamed, and more violently than ever she applied a shower of blows on the back of the retreating Republican.

Aline was seized with an irresistible fit of laughter, but the moment he decamped she could not but feel frightened at the possible consequences of this scene. Vaubon shared her alarm, but he contrived to avert bad results. Even the Municipality thought that women of eighty should not be compelled to marry patriots.

Aline had no books—no money wherewith to buy materials for work. Her aunt made her presents of dresses, which she sorely needed ; but pocket-money was not one of the things that she thought necessary for young ladies. Her time often hung heavy on her hands, she tried to read the 'History of China,' the only literature within her reach ; but it

was dry, and her mind wandered from it back to the scenes indelibly impressed on her memory.

One day she found Mdlle. de Marsoulier turning out the contents of an old bureau, and throwing on the floor heaps of letters which she was going to burn.

'Take them into the court,' she said to Aline, 'and make a bonfire of them. If I give them to those careless servants to burn, ten to one they will set a chimney on fire.'

Aline stooped to pick up the papers and gather them into a large basket. As she was doing so, a sudden thought struck her.

'Is it not a pity,' she said, 'to destroy all these letters? Some of them, perhaps, may be interesting.'

'Oh dear yes, many of them are; but what should I ever do with them? It tires my eyes to read handwriting. I shall never look at them again. What would be the use of keeping them?'

Aline took courage, and made a bold request.

'Would you mind my reading these letters before I burn them?'

'No; you may do so if you like. No one, thank goodness, has ever written anything to me which the whole world is not welcome to read.'

There does not seem cause for any great excitement in the fact of being allowed to read bundles of old letters. But if we take into account, that after having led a life of extraordinary agitation and emotion, Aline was suddenly plunged into a most monotonous existence, and without any resources for occupation, it is not to be wondered at that she was glad to have something to read which might afford her amusement. She dragged the heavy basket across the court into her room, and with great eagerness began to look into the yellow, dusty bundles of letters tied with faded ribbon of various hues. Many of them were dated far back in the century which was then drawing to a close. They contained characteristic details of a state of society which she had in her childhood seen

the last traces of, but which had passed away like a dissolving view. Packet after packet of these missives she read, many of them cleverly written, others amusing only because they belonged to an epoch which excited her interest and curiosity. There were business letters and letters of compliment, written on various occasions, which were dull enough ; but there was, generally speaking, something in them worth noticing.

On the second day, Aline took up a bundle on which was written, 'The letters of my cousin, the Comte de Courtelance.' They were dated from some place in Brittany. The writer addressed Mdlle. de Marsoulier as his cousin. This did not necessarily imply, at that time, any near relationship. They had evidently not met often since the days of their youth, but the writer seemed to make a point of informing his relative of the events which occurred in his family. He announced in one letter the death of his wife, and lamented that he had no direct heirs. In another he mentioned that he had adopted the children of a

brother who had been killed in battle ; and in those that followed, amidst dissertations on public affairs, there was, now and then, a remark about his nephew and his niece, little details which showed that he was fond of them, though there was much formality in his way of speaking of these little people. As years went on there was more of politics in these letters than of domestic information. Aline was surprised to see that a Breton nobleman was advocating changes and expressing hopes which savoured of liberalism. The last of M. de Courtelance's letters was written in '89. It contained the following sentences :

' My nephew and his friend, M. de Belsunce, were at Caen the other day, and called on Mdme. de Bretonvilliers. They both fell in love with her niece, Mdlle. Charlotte de Corday, who is a desperate Republican, and an enthusiastic admirer of M. Rousseau. My nephew eloquently describes the rare beauty and wonderful parts of this young lady. He is, however, greatly concerned at

her philosophical turn of mind, and thinks, but for that flaw in her otherwise exalted character, she might become a second Joan of Arc. You can easily imagine, my dear cousin, that I shall oppose a liaison which might involve other consequences than those of Mdlle. Charlotte's conversion. She is penniless, and though of a good family, yet one of rather petite noblesse.'

Aline eagerly examined the remaining letters of M. de Courtelance, in hopes of finding something more on this subject; but in vain—there was no further mention of his nephew, or of Mdlle. de Corday.

There was enough, however, in that one to make her heart beat and her cheeks flush. It will be remembered that, in the course of her first conversation with M. Alexandre, he had spoken of having been at Caen with his friend M. de Belsunce, and known Mdlle. de Corday. It seemed more than likely that he was the very nephew M. de Courtelance had adopted. She went back to the earlier letters, and read again with intense interest all the

previous allusions to the childhood and youth of this young man, whom she now felt convinced was her friend. The joy this supposition gave her was inexpressible. It no longer seemed so hopeless that they might one day meet again. She remained for a day or two under the impression of this belief; but afterwards it did not seem quite as certain. It was true that M. de Courtelance's nephew had one only sister, that he had been a friend of M. de Belsunce, and that he knew and admired Charlotte de Corday; but this did not, after all, prove their identity. Her spirits sank again.

She burnt all the other letters after reading them, but M. de Courtelance's she carefully tied up and sealed, and then hid them in a corner of the shelves behind the 'History of China.'

The next time her aunt was in a good humour she asked her what had become of her Breton correspondent. Mdlle. Marsoulier said he had been shot by the Republicans during the first war in the Vendée.

'And what has become of his nephew and his niece?'

'I have never heard anything about them.'

Aline questioned Vaubon on the subject, but neither did he know what had happened to them. There it remained. The vague hope those letters had raised unsettled her mind, without affording any real ground of consolation. She was rather more than less depressed in consequence.

In truth, for a young girl of ardent disposition and active mind, the life at Castel St. Guy afforded a dreary prospect. She caught herself sometimes almost regretting the emotions and the hardships she had been so accustomed to. There was now no future before her. To live with Mdlle. de Marsoulier and Vaubon, to dine with her and sup with him, to sit spinning and trying to keep awake, to mend her clothes and think, till her brain ached, of a thousand things she could not speak of—this was her existence. How long was it to last? It seemed already ages to her since she had arrived. It might go on

as it was for years, perhaps. Then the entire privation of public worship and opportunities of fulfilling her religious duties, more complete than she had ever known, weighed heavily upon her. She had no means of finding out a faithful priest in that neighbourhood, or even setting about inquiring for one. She did not altogether trust Vaubon. He was one of those men who never commit themselves; not a word ever escaped him which indicated clearly his religious or political opinions. Aline did not know, at that time, that he had relatives amongst the Terrorists; an accidental circumstance made her suspect it.

She was walking one day in the lane leading to the house, and, tired of pacing up and down the road, she sat down on a stile. Her aunt had forbidden her to go beyond a short distance from the house, unless accompanied by one of the servants. This restraint was singularly irksome to a girl like Aline, she who for years had been used to walk alone in the midst of dangers of every sort. It seemed hard to abstain from quiet country

walks for the sake of *convenance.* She would have rebelled against these injunctions had it not been for the resolution she had made to accept of every sacrifice, great and small, as a payment of her debt of gratitude. While she was deep in thought on this subject, the sound of footsteps startled her. She turned round, and a man asked her :

'Citoyenne, where is Castel St. Guy?'

She felt she had seen this person before, but could not call to mind where. She said :

'Just beyond the next turning of this lane.'

'Oh, as near as that.'

The stranger seemed disposed to linger and ask other questions. There was nothing disagreeable in his appearance, but, somehow or other, she felt uncomfortable at his talking to her, and, rising, walked in the opposite direction to the one she had indicated to him. When she turned back he had disappeared. She was worried at not being able to recollect where she had seen him before. All at once it flashed upon her.

He was the young man who had brought her a glass of water when she had fainted in Parcin's house.

What was he come for? Whom did he want to see at Castel St. Guy?

Soon afterwards she saw two persons coming out of the gate of the chateau, Vaubon and the stranger. She hid herself behind a tree; they passed near her, walking arm in arm, appearing very intimate. She noticed that the young man stopped when they came near the stile where she had been sitting, and looked about as if expecting to see some one; then they passed on, and she went home.

Vaubon did not appear at dinner that day, and Mdlle. de Marsoulier said:

'Vaubon is doing the honours of the place to a nephew of his who has come to visit him. They will dine in his apartment.'

'Where do his relatives live?' Aline asked.

'At Lyons, I believe.' That was all she learnt on the subject.

She soon found out that Mdlle. de Marsou-

lier's agent, though very deferential towards his employer, was the real master of her property, and managed it for their joint profit. He paid all her household expenses out of the rental of her estates, and she kept in her own hands the rest of her fortune. She seldom did anything without consulting him, but on rare occasions asserted herself and acted without his knowledge.

One day that he had gone to Moulins, a gentleman arrived at Castel St. Guy, and remained for some time shut up with her. He stayed for dinner, and Aline gathered from what he said, that he came from Nevers, and that he was a lawyer. He looked with interest at Aline, and when they returned to the drawing-room seemed anxious to converse with her. But it was one of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's peculiarities not to allow her guests to prolong their visits beyond dinner-time, and this gentleman was no exception to the rule. Aline had already noticed, on previous occasions, her method of getting rid of her friends, as soon as they had drunk

their coffee. It was, as usual, put in practice that day. She watched with lynx-eyes the unconscious visitor, and the first time he moved in his chair, she exclaimed :

'What, are you going, my dear sir? Must I be deprived so soon of the pleasure of your society? Mdlle. des Elmes, run and see if monsieur's horses are ready. He must not be kept waiting. To speed the parting guest is one of the duties of hospitality, though not an agreeable one in this case.'

And then she went on talking so fast of her regrets, that there was no possibility for the gentleman to slip in a word until it was announced that his horses were at the door. When the door had closed upon him, Mdlle. de Marsoulier composed herself to sleep.

Aline observed that the next day Vaubon looked very black, and she guessed, from their manner to each other, that her aunt and he had been disputing. For some days afterwards they were on bad terms, and she was employed in the disagreeable business of carrying messages from one to the other,

which were not free from acrimony. Perhaps, in the dearth of occupation and objects of interest, a little quarrelling was refreshing to the old lady. It was scarcely so to her niece, though the dulness of her life was such that a change, even of an unpleasant sort, relieved a little the dead weight of ennui which oppressed her.

However, an agreeable surprise awaited Aline: another niece, two or three years older than herself, made her appearance—a bright-looking, pleasing girl, very cordial in her manner. The cousins made friends at once. The new-comer was in the habit of paying an annual visit to Castel St. Guy. It was a duty, and she performed it, but the relief of finding such an interesting little being as Aline in that melancholy house was very great. They had, even on the first night of her arrival, a long conversation which proved the starting-point of what became a real friendship.

Louise d'Herbelay quickly found out that there was much to like and admire in

her young cousin besides her beautiful eyes and extreme *gentillesse*. Those *tête-à-têtes* made up for the constraint in the drawing-room. Mdlle. de Marsoulier could not endure that anything should be said in her presence which she did not hear: to guard against it, she had her companions' chairs placed on her right and on her left side; and, even when she slept, they did not venture to change their position. Sometimes they talked on their fingers—Aline had learnt to do so in the prison, and instructed Mdlle. d'Herbelay. The joy of escaping to the pavilion at the close of the evening made up for the previous ennui.

Louise d'Herbelay was of the greatest use to her young relative. She was not, perhaps, as clever as Madeleine Chozière, but she was more highly educated. Her father was a very superior man. She had associated since her childhood with men of great virtue and profound learning, and knew more of the world than the holy peasant of Fontaine. Aline had aimed at a height of perfection so

exalted that she was tempted to discouragement when she felt her own weakness. She had dreamed of heroic acts of virtue, and felt humiliated at having no worse trials than the tediousness and little vexations of her dull existence in her aunt's house. It was the blank prospect of the future that chiefly weighed upon her. To have nothing to look forward to, is a great suffering to young people. Louise discovered all this, and when she had heard all her history, she said :

'My dear Aline, I fancy that you tried to soar beyond your strength, and that you now find your wings are flagging. During the days which followed your dear Aunt Félicie's death, and your escape from Lyons, you were in a state of high-wrought fervour which sustained you. The resolution you made seemed capable of lifting you altogether above this world, but it has not quite the power of making ordinary sacrifices and small vexations palatable. The foundation on which you built was sufficient to support your resolutions as long as the enthusiasm of your

religious ardour lasted, but it is not strong enough to carry you through the dull and cloudy days which have followed.'

'I assure you, Louise, that it was that resolution which roused me when I was lying prostrate and in despair. And it was Madeleine who suggested it.'

'And she did well. The chords in your soul were all out of tune. She touched the one which was capable of harmonising them. It had its effect, and God forbid that I should for a moment wish you to renounce the work of gratitude to which you pledged yourself when all other stimulus seemed wanting. But what I ask is this, that you should humbly begin at the beginning, and not fancy that you can be a saint and a martyr at one bound. Madeleine has worked her way —I know her by reputation—to a height of virtue which her humility leads her to consider easily accessible to others. It is not so, by your own account? Even now she bears her home trials with surpassing sweetness——'

'Oh yes; I have wondered at her patience with her father. . . . I see what you mean, Louise; but it is so difficult to persevere without help or guidance, to be left to one's self, never to go to church. . . . While fervour lasts, it keeps one up; but, as you truly said just now, it is at moments as if the wings of the soul failed, and it was left grovelling on the earth.'

'Come, we must see to that,' Louise said. 'I have a little plan which I hope will succeed.'

She gazed at the blazing fagots, and remained silent and absorbed in thought. Aline glanced at the shelves, and thought of the bundle of letters. She longed to ask Louise if she knew anything of the family of Courtelance, but her courage failed. She fancied that Louise would be less indulgent to what was romantic in her gratitude than Madeleine. She was probably right.

Easter was very early that year. It was approaching. Louise sought and obtained permission from Mdlle. de Marsoulier to take

back her cousin with her for a few days to her father's chateau. This was almost the only unmixed pleasure Aline had known since her childhood.

It was a fine fresh morning in March when, in a conveyance sent for Louise, they drove off together. The orchards were bright with pink and white blossoms, the hedges full of primroses and daffodils. It did not look as if death and proscription were reigning over that smiling land where spring is so delicious and all so beautiful, save when the fierce spirit of man desolates its fair heritage of peace and prosperity.

The Vicomte d'Herbelay and his family had never left their home, and had been hitherto unmolested, even though proscribed priests often came there. Louise was a sister of charity to the whole neighbourhood. Her happy days were those when she procured for the dying the consolations of religion, or softened the sufferings of the sick. As in the days of persecution in England, there was in many of the French chateaux a priest's

room, to which these confessors of the faith resorted when strength gave way and they could no longer live in huts and travel from village to village, administering the sacraments to a still religious peasantry, or to the nobles residing at their chateaux in constant fear of arrest or mob violence.

Aline found during those days the needs of her soul amply supplied, and gathered fresh courage for whatever was to be her lot—whether dangers and sufferings such as she had experienced in Lyons, or the oppressive weight of ennui which, like a thick fog, hung over her existence at Castel St. Guy. But Louise would not hear of ennui. She said it was a malady to which no real Christian ought to be subject. There was always plenty to do for anyone bent upon occupation. Self-training furnished constant employment, and, with a view to future usefulness, there was always something to study and learn.'

'Even at Castel St. Guy?'

'Oh yes. For instance, if I were you, I

would study cooking under Nannette. It is a very valuable talent.'

'I know I used to think so at the Recluses. I was so glad to have learnt how to make an omelette.'

'Well, make yourself familiar also with all the details of the laundry; sweep your room yourself; compose stories, write verses, however imperfect they may be; keep mind and hands employed. Never give way to depression or discouragement. I heard a sermon which I have never forgotten, on the text: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward." Those words, "go forward," have such a blessed meaning in them. Oh Aline, let us press on along the upward path, making the best of every minute of our time. We shall never complain then of ennui. The priest, to whom you went to confession last night has to spend the whole of the daylight hours in a dark cave. Do you think he is bored?'

'Perhaps not; but he is a saint.'

'Well, *be* a saint.'

Aline smiled and replied :

'More easily said than done.'

'Everyone can try, and when we try very hard for anything, there is no room for ennui.'

'My difficulty is, Louise, that I have been used to such a different life. It was a very hard one for three years; every moment, fears, alarms, sudden changes, and then those months of my aunt's captivity, were one constant alternation of anguish and joy. I miss even the acute sufferings of those days.'

'I have no doubt you do, my little Aline. I remember a friend of mine saying, "Oh for those dear old days when I was so miserable!" It was of a different kind of sorrow than yours she spoke, but there is something of the same nature in your feelings. When you stood with your feet in the mud, and tears of disappointment in your eyes, at the door of the prison, there was a glow in your heart, a little bit of self-complacency in your soul, which sustained you——'

'Yes, and the thought that I did it for Aunt Félicie. That was the real support——'

'Yes, love makes all things easy. If we could realise that every bit of suffering, the meanest and the least, can be borne for His sake who died for us, it would change the aspect of our lives.'

Aline thought of the debt she had resolved to pay by self-sacrifice, and said:

'Can inaction be offered up as well as good works, for those on whom we wish to draw down blessings?'

'Assuredly it may, like every other kind of suffering God ordains for us. It is often sent as a preparation for fresh conflicts. They may come sooner than you expect.'

After a pause Louise began again. 'Do you try to be of use to Mdlle. de Marsoulier?'

'She does not seem to care for anything I could do for her.'

'But perhaps you do not go about it in the right way. You should endeavour to amuse her. She was complaining the other day that the world had grown very dull. I thought to myself, "Would it were dull to most people,

and not horribly exciting, just now;" but it is really dull to her. In her youth she was made much of. She was rich and courted. Now people forget her existence, and do not think of giving her pleasure. She was saying the other day that her friends used to make her presents—to organise fêtes to please her, but that no one thought now whether she had a fête-day or not. Well, her fête-day happens to be next week. I am going back with you to spend a few days more with the old lady. She made me promise to do so when I obtained leave to carry you off. Why should we not celebrate the day, and give her a surprise?'

'Oh yes, Louise! but what *can* we give her, and what *can* I do?'

'You shall compose a compliment; set to work at once, and I will unfold to you my plan as we ride on Thursday to Castel St. Guy. Here I must make the most of my time, so as to leave all in order during my absence, and instruct my assistant Jeanne as to emergencies which might arise before I could be sent for.'

'A compliment!' Aline ejaculated.

'Yes; lose no time about it.'

Aline laughed, and, borrowing a pencil and a bit of paper, went into the garden. It seemed as if new life was infused into her since she had arrived at the Chateau d'Herbelay. It was one of God's especial mercies to this young girl that, whilst deprived for long periods together of the ordinary means of grace, she had enjoyed the benefit of the highest examples of goodness and self-devotion. Mdlle. de Bellecise, Madeleine Chozière, her own Aunt Félicie, la Melon, and now Louise, had all given her practical lessons of holiness, of more value than sermons and spiritual books. They were living, daily examples of the power of religion in different positions, different circumstances, different characters. Louise, especially, obtained over her an influence which lasted as long as her existence. Yet she did not know, at the time of that first visit, one-half of the heroism of her life. It was only afterwards that she learnt that one of the priests who frequented the house was

at that very time dying in a room where no one knew he was secreted, but Louise and one faithful servant. The danger of discovery and its consequences were great. She determined to spare her aged father all knowledge of the poor abbé's illness, which had overtaken him suddenly one night, after saying Mass. A friendly physician who occasionally visited the Comte d'Herbelay, she admitted into the secret; he attended the invalid without raising suspicions. When he died, Louise and her companion buried him themselves in the garden; she gave notice of the event to the concealed priests in the neighbourhood. Some of them came at night to perform the burial rites, and bless the resting-place of the holy servant of God who had laid down his life for the sake of his flock. Exposure to every kind of hardship had brought it to a premature end.

But whilst secretly performing these solemn and anxious duties, Louise was the sunshine of her father's existence, the charm of the domestic circle, the cheerful companion of her

young cousin. She would have ardently wished to keep Aline with her, and to associate her with her works of charity. She had served at Lyons an apprenticeship which would have made her a valuable assistant. On the very night when her patient was in his last agony, an old half-blind priest who had come to give him the last sacraments, had to regain his shelter before daylight. Once on the high-road his way would be plain enough, but the lanes and the wood were dangerous for one so infirm.

'Would you be afraid, Aline, to accompany M. le Curé as far as the high-road? It is a walk of two miles in the dark.'

Aline had been used to go about unprotected in the streets amidst sights and sounds of terror, but the wood at that hour of the night rather alarmed her. However, she thought of her guardian angel, and of the friend who had been with her on a dark night, the saddest and the happiest of her life, and her courage rose. She accepted the task, and bravely performed it. Once her companion

and herself were startled with the sound of voices, and, from some words which reached their ears, they had every reason to be afraid. Flight was dangerous and concealment impossible : they were in a narrow lane.

'We are lost,' the curé whispered. 'Run away, mademoiselle, I beseech you. It is your only chance. I will stand still and meet them.'

Aline, instead of obeying him, jumped on a cart that was lying alongside the road. She was dressed in white. The moon was gleaming through dark clouds. By its ghastly light she looked unnaturally tall. With a sepulchral voice she cried :

'I am sent from the infernal regions to carry you back with me into the bottomless pit!'

The half-drunken men, terrified at the apparition, stood an instant petrified, then jumped over the hedge, and ran across the fields. The high-road was gained in safety, and Aline returned unmolested.

Many were the reports spread in the neigh-

bourhood about the ghost which had appeared in the Chemin du Diable, which was indeed the name of the lane where the apparition had been seen.

One evening, an unexpected arrival at the chateau caused some anxiety, and yet it was that of a cousin and of a friend. A nephew of the Comte d'Herbelay's was an officer in the army, and, moreover, a firm adherent of the Republic. Still, he maintained a friendly intercourse with his relatives; and happening to be in the neighbourhood, he proposed to pay them a visit. No answer reached him, but, relying on a kind welcome, he made his appearance, and was cordially received. The evening began well. At first only family topics were discussed, and hardly any allusion made to passing events. Louise tried to avert all discussion, or even mention of burning questions. Her father, however, could not restrain an outburst on the iniquities of the Reign of Terror. Henri d'Herbelay said:

'It is a terrible necessity; but desperate

perils require desperate remedies. You have not been molested, I trust ?'

Louise answered :

'Not yet as regards our lives and property; but man does not live by bread alone, and we suffer in ways which touch us even more closely.'

It so happened that they expected a priest to say Mass that very night in the chapel of the chateau. One o'clock was the appointed hour. Louise saw no reason for foregoing this blessing. Their guest would be asleep in bed long before that time.

When the abbé arrived he was conducted to the chapel. A profound silence reigned in the house. This good priest was very deaf, and spoke so loud that it always kept his congregation in fear and trembling.

Aline, the quickness of whose hearing was such that her brothers used to call her ' Fairy Fine Ears,' and to ask her if she heard the grass grow, discerned the noise of steps approaching the door. She whispered this to Louise; who went up to the abbé. He

was intoning the 'Gloria in Excelsis.' She said :

'Not so loud, not so loud, M. l'Abbé!'

But it was in vain. She could not make him understand.

The Republican officer came in. He stood at the door with a grave expression of countenance.

No one moved, and Mass went on.

At the moment of the Elevation, Louise turned round and looked appealingly at her cousin. That look reminded him of the day when they had made their first Communion in the parish church of La Trinité. He bent his knee. She saw it, and drew a deep sigh of relief ; truly she had reason to thank God, for that hour proved a turning-point in the life of one for whom she had long felt a deep interest.

When the Mass was ended, he left the chapel, and she followed him. They talked together almost all that night.

Thenceforward, though he never abandoned his political opinions, he began to

detest the crimes of the Revolution, and to mitigate the fate of its victims when any opportunity offered of so doing.

She, on the other hand, learnt something too, and that was that where crime is not in question, there is always something to be said on both sides which allows of good and just men taking the most opposite views on political questions. Not to condemn others for opinions differing from her own had always been Louise's bias. It was strongly confirmed by her conversation that night with her Republican cousin. They entered on a correspondence which saved many a life during the terrible months which followed, and enabled her to render great services to innocent persons.

CHAPTER IV.

ALINE AND HER BROTHERS.

THE day came too quickly, Aline thought, when she was to go back to Castel St. Guy; and though Louise returned with her, it was with a heavy heart she left the place where she had been so happy, where she had had many a good joyous laugh, and given way to some of that youthful gaiety so long suppressed by the tragical events she had witnessed. It was on purpose that Louise provoked those bursts of merriment. It is not well for the young not to know what it is to be joyous, to dwell on nothing but gloomy thoughts. It is like living in a room which no ray of sunshine has

warmed. It was for Aline's sake as well as Mdlle. de Marsoulier's, for the young girl's sake as well as the octogenarian's, that she had planned the little festivity which was to open a new era, she hoped, at Castel St. Guy.

As the cousins rode together that day, no one could have imagined what grave cares habitually weighed on the mind of the eldest of the two. She was, for the time being, as intent on her little plans for the old lady's fête as on the matters of life and death which so often claimed her solicitude in her own home. She gaily related her projects, told Aline that she had written to M. de l'Espinasse and his son, relatives of her own, as well as of Mdlle. de Marsoulier, and begged them to propose themselves to dinner at Castel St. Guy on St. Leo's Day. They had done so, and received a gracious answer. The question was now, what presents to make to Aunt Léonie. Louise had found amongst her treasures several trifles which she proposed to give her. At a little town where they stopped to

rest the horses she purchased bonbons, oranges, chestnuts, dried fruits, and cakes. Aline had been working slippers with the hope of finding an opportunity of sending them to one of her brothers, but now she determined to lay them at the feet of Mdlle. de Marsoulier. The cousins determined to spend their leisure-hours next day in gathering ivy and making garlands—in great secrecy, of course.

The reception they met with on their arrival was not particularly gracious. The Constitutional curé was sitting with Mdlle. de Marsoulier, and between him and Louise a coldness existed, which no efforts on both sides to be civil could disguise, and which Mdlle. de Marsoulier resented. However, in the evening she brightened up, and informed her nieces, with great satisfaction, of the visit she expected from M. de l'Espinasse and his son. She thought the young ladies not quite so attentive to her on the morrow as they should have been, and made some sharp observations about young people nowadays thinking of nothing but pleasing themselves,

and that in her youth things were very different. But Louise was so merry and so coaxing, so funny in her way of meeting these insinuations, that in spite of herself she was pacified.

Aline was hard at work with the servants making bouquets and wreaths, for the whole household had entered with great spirit into the plan—it was such a relief, in that house, to do something different from usual, to have something to smile and whisper about ; even M. Vaubon entered into the fun.

Aline had a finishing-touch to give to her compliment—a very elaborate piece of versification, containing here and there a pretty line and a tribute to the generous kindness which had given shelter to a poor tempest-tossed little bird like herself. She recited it to Louise before they went to bed, and received great praise for her performance.

On the eventful day itself, the company arrived in time for dinner. M. de l'Espinasse undertook to entertain Mdlle. de Marsoulier

during the hours which succeeded her siesta. The young ladies begged him to make himself as agreeable as possible in order to give them time to finish their preparations, compose their speeches, concert their operations. He did his best, poor man, and whenever Mdlle. de Marsoulier fidgeted in her chair and said, 'What is become, I wonder, of my nieces?' he instantly asked her some question about the court of Louis XV. and Mdme. de Pompadour's receptions, which turned the current of her thoughts.

Meanwhile the rest of the inhabitants of Castel St. Guy were assembled in the kitchen and rehearsing the course of the proceedings. Everyone was to be somewhat disguised, everyone was to carry and present something; all in proper order.

'Who shall represent Mdlle. de Marsoulier?' Louise exclaimed.

'Oh, here is Père Bontemps,' Aline cried, and seizing by the hand an old peasant who had happened to have brought in some cucumbers, she led him to a chair and told him

he was to sit there in state and listen to their speeches.

She led the way, made a profound curtsey, and recited, in an emphatic manner, her compliment. He seemed quite awe-struck, and said it was very fine—only he could not understand Latin, and did not know what it was all about. At last everything was ready, and Jacques despatched to the parlour to announce that a numerous society was at the door, and begged to have the honour of paying their respects to Mdlle. de Marsoulier.

'You know very well that I do not receive strangers.'

'I told them so,' Jacques answered; 'but they will take no denial.'

'But I tell you I won't see them. What an hour for visitors to call! Send them away.'

'They are in the hall, and won't leave the house without seeing mademoiselle.'

'What sort of looking people are they?' the old lady said, standing up and lean-

ing on her cane. 'Do you know them, Jacques?'

'No, mademoiselle.'

'But it is too bad, at this late hour. How many of them are there?'

'A dozen, at least.'

'A dozen? How can I ask so many persons to supper? I never knew so indiscreet a proceeding. M. de l'Espinasse, will you, if you please, light the candles? Make haste—you are so slow!'

The gentleman thus adjured seized on a bit of paper.

'My patience, what are you doing?' Mdlle. de Marsoulier said. 'Here is an allumette. What an idea, to call on people at this hour!'

The door opened, and she too opened her round eyes very wide. The strangers entered, each with a basket of sugar-plums or dried fruit in one hand, and in the other a bouquet or wreath of wild flowers. Frederic, M. de l'Espinasse's son, was the bearer of an immense cake; Vaubon carried a flag on

which was written, 'Vive la Chatelaine de Castel St. Guy.'

Then the visitors ranged themselves round the room, and sang stanzas in honour of Mdlle. de Marsoulier and her patron saint, St. Leo. The good lady was quite bewildered. When the singing was over, the gifts of the company were laid at her feet, and then Aline recited her compliment; but Mdlle. de Marsoulier was so dazzled by the offerings displayed on her table, so puzzled with the whole scene, that she did not take much notice of the poetry. Then both her nieces kissed her and laughed. It all flashed upon her, she laughed too, and thanked everybody. A joyful confusion arose; such laughter and gay voices, such pleased faces, had never been seen at St. Guy.

The evening was as merry as possible. In Mdlle. de Marsoulier's aged face there was a touching look of pleasure. It was as if the sluices of a long-closed fount had been opened. She shook hands with her old servants she embraced all her relatives; she

called Louise 'my child,' and Aline 'my little one.'

It was a great success, something out of keeping with the misery of the times, with the agony of France at that moment, with what the morrow was to bring forth; but it was good in its way, and no one who had taken part in the little fête ever regretted they had done so.

Louise and Aline sat up late that night making plans for the future. They proposed to keep up a frequent intercourse between Castel St. Guy and the Chateau d'Herbelay, and to pay each other visits whenever their respective duties allowed of it. They hoped that their joint efforts might succeed in withdrawing Mdlle. de Marsoulier from the schismatic curé's influence, and that they might interest her in the fate of the faithful persecuted clergy. It was past midnight when they retired to rest. Aline felt happier than she had done for a long time. Her sleep was sound that night, and her dreams pleasant. Early in the morning she was

awoke by a slight touch on her hand, and opening her eyes, she saw Louise standing by her bedside with an expression in her face which roused her at once and made her ask :

'What has happened ?'

Louise said, 'Our poor aunt ! Who would have thought her end so near, when we were wishing her, last night, many happy returns of the day ? Aline, she is no more.'

Mdlle. de Marsoulier had died in the night, quite suddenly it seemed. Aline dressed herself hastily, and went with Louise to the room where she was lying. Some of the servants were weeping bitterly, for she was loved by her dependents in spite of all her grumblings and eccentricities. Aged as she was, no one expected her to die so soon.

Aline used to think that she would have to spend eight or ten years, all her remaining youth perhaps, in that house, which, before Louise came to it, she had felt so melancholy an abode, but which just lately had appeared to her in another light. Whilst kneeling by

the lifeless body of this aunt, she reverted to the tragical end of that other aunt taken from her under such different circumstances. But oh ! how far more blest, how far more sweet that violent death, with all its horrors, than this tranquil extinction of life without apparent preparation or struggle ! Then, after praying there awhile, the cousins met M. Vaubon in the parlour, the scene of their little festivity the night before.

He consulted Louise, as the eldest relative of the deceased lady, as to the arrangements for the funeral and the opening of her will, which had been deposited in the hands of a lawyer at Nevers, who had paid her a visit for that purpose a short time since, and with whom he would at once communicate. Two of her servants had witnessed it. He was, no doubt, anxious about its contents, but he did not exhibit any indecent solicitude on the subject.

Louise decided, difficult as it was for her to do so, to remain with Aline till that melancholy and important day was over. If unprovided for, she meant to take her back at

once to the Chateau d'Herbelay for an indefinite time, and, in any case, for awhile. But these plans were also doomed to be defeated. Two days after Mdlle. de Marsoulier's death a man called with a letter, which he said was for Mdlle. des Elmes, and asked to be paid for his trouble. He was ordered into the kitchen to get some refreshment, whilst Aline, who had changed colour on recognising her brother Maurice's handwriting, read the following words :

'My dear little Sister,

'I came here from my place of concealment, on the Swiss side of the frontier, in consequence of a message announcing that A. was at Lyons, and dangerously ill. I disguised myself as well as I could, and joined him. We are, of course, strictly concealed, and for the present, I think, in safety. A. is hovering between life and death, and in his delirium keeps calling for you. I have discovered where you are, and despatch a messenger you can trust ; and if it is possible,

return with him. Bring a little money with you if you can. What I had with me is nearly exhausted, and A. requires comforts. God bless you, little one.'

This letter had been many days on its way. Aline gave it to Louise and exclaimed:

'I must go. My own darling André—my brave Maurice! I must go to them at once.'

Louise looked at the pale, thin face and resolute countenance of her poor little cousin, and shuddered at the thought of her return to Lyons, where things were going on from bad to worse and the very air was pestilential, and that in order to join her two brothers, who, as returned émigrés, would be, if discovered, inevitably doomed to death. But she did not try to stop her. She saw at once that it would be of no use, and would harass her needlessly. She pressed her to her heart—then went to speak to the messenger, whom she paid for his journey, and bade him

to be in readiness to accompany Aline to Lyons. This done, she asked M. Vaubon to procure a conveyance, and she borrowed a sum of money from him to give Aline for present exigencies. Then she went to help her to get ready.

'Louise, whatever happens to me, I shall think of you as the best and most true of friends. What you have been to me at this moment of my life, God only knows. My Communion in your chapel was a viaticum for the journey I am about to take. The words of the good priest on the night before I left are still in my ears, "Courage and confidence. If you have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, God will be with you." I feel He is with me now, I am not afraid. Oh Louise, there are many things worse than dying one's self. Pray for my André——'

They parted. M. Vaubon told Aline that he should have to go to Lyons in a few days, and that he would then inform her of the contents of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's will. He gave

her a direction where she could hear of him. He also procured a passport from the municipal authorities, on the plea that her health required immediate and first-rate medical advice. He had not been let into the secret of her brother's being in Lyons; but Louise had told him that Aline had a relative in that city who was dangerously ill, and gave him to understand that it might be of future advantage to her if she could see this gentleman before he died. People were getting accustomed to great reserve in the mention of names, so that he was not surprised at this only partial confidence, and showed himself very obliging about all the arrangements for her departure.

Once more Aline entered Lyons. The past rose before her with painful intensity as she drove through the principal streets to the suburb where her guide conducted her. The fierce aspect of the people in the streets; the expression of stolid indifference put on by those whose only object seemed to be to glide by without attracting notice—an expression

she remembered so well studying herself to assume; the sound of tramping feet; at one place a crowd of people rushing by vociferating; the public criers carrying about the lists of those executed the day before, and those condemned that day—revived the reminiscences of the past winter, and made her tremble from head to foot. She had lost the habit of such scenes.

At last the by-street and mean-looking house where her brothers were lodging was reached. As the cart drove up to the door, it opened, and Maurice, whom she had not seen for four years and would hardly have recognised, received her into his arms, and carried rather than led her upstairs. André was better. The crisis of his illness was past, but his feebleness extreme. Aline instantly undertook the duties of a nurse, from which Maurice was glad to be relieved. A small room adjoining the one occupied by her brothers had been prepared for her. André was overjoyed at her arrival, and disposed to talk more than was good for him. After a

while she was obliged to leave the room, in order to force him to be quiet. In a little parlour below, Maurice and she sat down together, and then he broke to her the news of their father's death. M. des Elmes had caught the small-pox in Switzerland, and died soon after the news had reached him of his sister's execution. An old friend of his was with him, and received his last messages for his children.

'His end was very peaceful,' Maurice said. 'He had the last sacraments, and said that, except on your account, poor little one, he was glad to die. The last four years had entirely disenchanted him of life.'

Aline wept a long time, with her head on her brother's shoulder. Then she raised it, and said :

'We three are all in all to one another now. What shall we do when André is well enough to leave this dreadful city ? Why did he come here ?'

'I really hardly know. He is as thoughtless as ever. He was too ill to be questioned

when I arrived, and he is not inclined to speak much even now.'

'Does he know what you have just told me?'

'I broke it to him yesterday. He was very much affected; but I doubt if anything makes a deep impression upon him.'

'Maurice, it is very dangerous for you both to be here.'

'Of course, it is perilous in the extreme.'

'Now that I am with him, you should go away as soon as possible.'

'It is perhaps safer now to stay here than to go. The only passport I have is forged. I could not travel again to the frontier without one, and it would be madness to ask for it. All we have to do, Aline, is to vegetate here, and try to escape notice; but how we are to live I do not know.'

'I have some money Louise d'Herbelay gave me; it will support us for a few days. We must get some work. As soon as André is well enough to go, him, at any rate, we must try and send out of Lyons. He would get us immediately into difficulties. Maurice,

when he was in such great danger, did he think of God and his soul ?'

'He was hardly conscious enough to have any thoughts at all; but I am afraid he has entirely lost his faith. In these godless days it is hard enough to preserve it.'

'You have ?' Aline said, taking his hand, on which her tears fell fast.

Maurice nodded assent.

'Thank God for that,' she said. 'Oh, brother, brother, let us cling to it in life and in death, and do all we can for André.'

Maurice shook his head.

'I have not the least influence over my brother. It is enough for me to hold an opinion, for him to take up an opposite one. You, little one, had always the knack of managing André. You must take him in hand now. It is most desirable that we should part soon; to remain here together, of course, increases the danger to both. If we could by any means obtain passports and cross the frontier, I could return to Lucerne and find André something to do. By-the-

way, when he was light-headed, he was always calling for you, but also talking of Sophie. Who can that be ?'

'Oh, that is Sophie de Souligné, the daughter of the Vice-administrator of Customs. I fancy there is an engagement between them, and that it is to see her he keeps coming back to Lyons.'

'Did she, I wonder, send me the news of his illness ?'

'Very likely.'

'If we could get passports it would be better to take him over the frontier, and let him enlist again in the royal army. But it is a perfect dream to think of passports.'

Aline was not so sure of that. She told Maurice that in a few days Vaubon would be at Lyons, and that she knew where to find him.'

'And whom may Vaubon be ?' he asked.

She then gave him an account of her sojourn at Castel St. Guy, of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's life there, her agent's position,

her recent death, and his offer of serving her.

'He has,' she said, 'I can have no doubt of it, very intimate friends amongst the Montagnards, and some influence with them. I think he might get you passports, supposing it was not too great a risk to let him know that you and André are here.'

The door opened: André, tired of bed, had got up and dressed. He came into the room looking feeble, wan, and pale, but just as good-looking as ever. There was the same bright expression in his eyes, the same engaging smile and charming manner as in his boyish days.

'What are the two wise ones talking about?' he said, thrusting himself between his tall brother and his tiny sister.

'Oh, André,' Aline exclaimed, 'Maurice has told me that our father is no more!' and she burst into tears, upon which he put his arm round her neck, stroked her dark hair, and kissed away her tears.

It was long since anyone had caressed

her. She felt soothed by his tenderness, but too sad to carry on briskly the conversation. After a pause, he said :

'All I know is that I am sick of France, and particularly sick of Lyons. In a day or two more I shall be myself again, and then off I go, at any cost and any risk.'

'But, André, if you are discovered, you die. There is no hope of mercy for an émigré.'

'I don't care. Stop here I won't.'

'I am going to make an effort to obtain passports for Maurice and you. I hope to succeed.'

'You! Well, you always have been a good and clever little puss. I think you were born to get your wild brother out of scrapes. That is your vocation—is not that the word good people have always in their mouths? I wonder what mine is.'

'I have no doubt on that subject,' Aline said, with a sad smile.

'Well, out with it! What is it?'

'To increase the merit of those who suffer from your recklessness.'

'Very severe indeed, little one; but I will forgive your impertinence if you help us over the frontier. But you must come too.'

'No, André. You and Maurice will, I am sure, re-enter active life. I should be alone in a strange land. I do not want to leave France.'

'Come now, little sister: tell me all that has happened to you since we parted at Les Elmes. But let me lie on the sofa. Sit down, both of you, near me. And now begin, little A. G.'

Aline told her brothers all that has been related in the previous chapters. Then Maurice gave an account of his adventures after the disbanding of the royal army. As she listened to him, his sister sighed to think that, though there was everything to esteem and admire in him, it was still the old story over again. She did not love him as much as André, and was angry with herself for it.

Maurice then left the room, and she questioned André as to the reason of his return to Lyons. Life, he said, was not worth having at

the horrid place where he had been secreted so long.

'I do assure you, little one, that my hair was turning grey, and old age overtaking me, in that dismal hole. I should have left it long ago, but I had not a sou in my pocket, and did not know where to turn my steps. An opportunity offered of entering Lyons under a feigned name. Love and ennui drove me to run the risk, and, as luck would have it, the very day afterwards I fell sick, and you know the rest. Maurice is the best of men and brothers; but oh, I am so glad you are come, little one, with your pretty face to cheer me up! He does look so solemn, and is given to preach.'

'But I shall preach too.'

'And I shall laugh at you. But don't imagine I do not feel the loss of our poor father, or that dear aunt of ours, who is the only saint I believe in.'

'Oh, André, André, do not talk in that way! I cannot bear it.'

'Nonsense! I mean no harm; only I know

that I should like to kill those who killed her, and I shall if I have a chance. By-the-way, another saint in my calendar is the blessed Charlotte Corday. I perfectly revere that girl.'

'Would you have been glad if your sister had done what she did?'

'Oh, really, my imagination cannot stretch so far. Only imagine, little one, running a dagger into Fouquier-Tinville or Robespierre! Yes, I should like it very much, if it were not for fear of consequences. I don't want my A. G. to be guillotined.'

The conversation was interrupted by Maurice's return, and he and Aline seriously discussed the question of the passports. She felt in her element again, planning and contriving for her brother's escape. But they had to wait till the day when Vaubon was to be in Lyons. Meanwhile André rapidly regained strength. With the money she had brought with her, Aline procured for him good food and wine which hastened his recovery. At last the time, so eagerly

looked for, arrived. She walked again through the busy crowded streets with a slight hope and a great fear in her heart, and made her way to the house where Vaubon was to be heard of.

When she reached that house, she recognised it at once. It was the one where she had twice called to see Parcin during her aunt's trial, and where a young man had given her a glass of water when she had nearly fainted. She had since had reason to suppose, from what Mdme. de Bellecise had told her, that this young man must have been Hypolite Parcin, the son of the President of the Tribunal, a most impassioned and fanatical Jacobin. Were these Vaubon's influential friends? she felt horror and disgust at the thought; but, on the other hand, if this were the case, there might be more hope of obtaining what she wanted than if his friends had been less powerful. She knocked, and asked the maid-servant who opened the door if she could give her Citoyen Vaubon's address.

'He is staying here,' the girl replied.

'Is he at home?'

'I will inquire.'

A few moments afterwards the maid appeared, and conducted Aline into a dingy back room, where she sat down hesitating how much, or how little, to confide in the man who could save her brothers. He came in, and said:

'I am very glad to see you, Mdlle. Aline, for I have important news to communicate. Your deceased relative's will was read in presence of witnesses after her funeral. It was drawn up by a lawyer from Nevers, whom you remember—an old friend of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's. She has requited my long services by the bequest of her house at Nevers, and a sum of two hundred thousand francs. To you, mademoiselle, she has left the chateau and estate of St. Guy, and an equal sum of money. There are legacies besides, to Mdlle. d'Herbelay, the Abbé Lemaire, her lawyer, and a few other friends and servants. The rental of St. Guy amounts, on an average, to 50,000 francs

a year. So I may congratulate you on the possession of a large fortune. On account, no doubt, of the troubled times, and your being a ward of the state, Mdlle. de Marsoulier directs in her will that I shall continue to manage your property until your majority, paying you meanwhile an income of twenty-five thousand francs a year, and allowing the remainder to accumulate up to the time of your being of age, and that is to stand good whether in the interval you marry or not. This must, of course, be subject to the decision of the municipal authorities; but I have spoken to them, and if you accept of the arrangement I have mentioned, I apprehend no difficulties.'

Aline was greatly astonished at the communication. She did not think that she had been a particular favourite with her aunt, and though it had crossed her mind with some degree of hope, perhaps, that she might leave her a small provision, this large inheritance took her entirely by surprise. She was, no doubt, glad of the news, but it rather op-

pressed her, and she did not feel that complete confidence in Vaubon which would have made her rejoice at the close connection established between them by the terms of the will, although she could not but admit that under the circumstances it formed the best safeguard for her peaceable possession of the property bequeathed to her. His mysterious influence with the Revolutionary Committee was a puzzle, but there were instances during the Revolution of these strange connections, more extraordinary still than this one.

During the height of the Terror, and up to the moment of his fall, a relation of Robespierre's was in constant communication with him. Her name was Mdlle. de Marconnay. She was a devout Catholic, a most charitable person and a devoted friend of the persecuted priests. Still she kept on good terms with the dictator, and saved many a life by her influence with him.

But this was not what chiefly occupied Aline's mind—the question of the passports had to be broached. Without naming her

brothers she told Vaubon that she had friends whom she was most anxious to get out of Lyons, and asked if he would kindly help her to effect this. Whilst she was speaking, the thought crossed her mind that she was no longer poor, and her remembrance of the power of a few assignats on the gaolers she had had to deal with, gave rise to a sudden hope that the fortune just bequeathed to her might be useful on a larger scale in smoothing away difficulties.

Vaubon said he would see what could be done, provided her friends were not émigrés. To such the Committee would show no mercy. Aline did not betray the consternation she felt at hearing this, and thought it more prudent only to say :

'One of them has been working for a long time in a manufactory at Crusols. He became tired of that life, and came here for a change ; but, being young and thoughtless, you can well magine that he is in constant risk, in Lyons, of saying or doing something which might bring him to the scaffold. He fell ill, and a

brother of his came here to nurse him, and as I dearly loved the parents of these young men, I am most anxious to forward their departure.'

She was all the time revolving in her mind whether to speak openly or not to Vaubon; whether to press for the passports, and confide to him the real state of the case.

He was meanwhile turning over the copy of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's will, and making remarks upon it. She appeared to listen, but was meditating on what her next words should be, when the door opened, and the young man who had given her a glass of water when she had been in that house before, and whom she had seen with Vaubon at St. Guy, dashed into the room, shouting:

'Come along, uncle; I have been waiting for you more than an hour.'

He stopped short when he saw Aline, made a bow and a sort of apology. She acknowledged it by bending her head. The remembrance of the dreadful hour she had spent in that house made her shudder,

and so did the sudden discovery that Vaubon was the near relative of the friends and associates of Challier and Collot d'Herbois. She turned so pale, and looked so ill, that Vaubon offered to send for a carriage or to accompany her home.

Oh, that word 'home,' how sadly it sounded in the ears of the proscribed and hunted victims of the reign of terror! She absolutely refused both offers. Not for the world now would she have let him further into her confidence. Still she felt it necessary to keep on good terms with Vaubon; nor did she see any absolute reason to distrust his sincerity. She wished for a few more moments of private conversation with him, but M. Hypolite showed no disposition to leave the room, and kept looking at her with an undisguised admiration which coloured her cheeks, an instant before so white, with a hot flush of indignation.

'I will come another time,' she said, 'when I can speak to you alone.'

Hypolite Parcin burst out laughing.

'Thank you, citoyenne, for the hint; I will

make myself scarce, and the more so that I am behindhand in my duties. The President is in the worst of tempers. He says, like a certain Roman emperor, that he wishes all the traitors in Lyons had but one head; it would save him no end of time and trouble. 'I say Uncle Vaubon, take care of yours,' he added, patting with repulsive pleasantry the grey head of his relative. 'You are a famous patriot, but your heart is too soft. Adieu, citoyenne—au revoir, I hope.'

As he walked out of the house and down the street, the ex-secretary of Collot d'Herbois said to himself, 'What is there about these aristocratic young ladies, as we used to call them, that takes one's fancy so strangely? This little girl's eyes drive me wild. The daughters of good Republicans never have that indescribable something which fascinates one in these high-born girls. Ever since I saw that little citoyenne in her beautiful despair, she has been haunting me like a phantom. How nice it would be to have such a small creature as that for one's wife.

Uncle Vaubon seems on a friendly footing with her. I must pump the old gentleman on the subject, and keep my eye upon the young woman.'

When his nephew had left the room, Vaubon said to Aline:

'You heard that young man call me his uncle. I may as well tell you that his mother was my only sister. She was a good woman, Mdlle. des Elmes—one whom you would have respected. I need not tell you that my relatives and myself differ widely in opinion, though I have kept on civil terms with them. As to Hypolite, his mother, on her death-bed, asked me to watch over him, and for her sake I have always done so. I flatter myself that more than one person has had reason to be thankful for my connection with Parcin.'

'Is this a good man?' Aline thought, 'or a great humbug?'

That doubt she did not feel able to solve.

Before she left, Vaubon said he had brought with him two thousand francs, on account, of what he had in hand belonging to her, in case

she was in want of ready money. This was indeed acceptable. She said she would be glad to see him again soon, but that this house had such painful recollections for her that she would like, if possible, to meet him somewhere else. He thought a moment, and then named a time in the morning on the following day but one, when he would be passing through the Place des Terraux, and gave her a rendezvous near one of the public fountains.

CHAPTER V.

PARCIN'S BARGAIN.

ALINE hastened back, and found both her brothers at home. She told them the news of Mdlle. de Marsoulier's bequest. Both were glad, but showed it in different ways. Maurice said it was no doubt a Godsend, but that at that time the possession of property was attended with increased danger, and that she was completely at the mercy of Vaubon. Indeed, it was better that he, who had an interest in the maintenance of the will, should hold her share of the fortune also. The more closely connected he was with the rulers of the day, the more likely he was not to be interfered

with. He thought that there was nothing for Aline to do but to act by his advice, receive whatever remittances he chose to make to her, and live as quietly as possible at Castel St. Guy.

'Madeleine,' she said, 'would perhaps, for a time, come and stay with me, and so would Louise d'Herbelay.'

'Exactly so,' André said, bursting out laughing; 'and you had better take the name of Mdlle. de Marsoulier, and afford the present generation just such a pattern of old maidenhood—only where will you get the nieces to bully?'

'Hush, André, hush! I am sorry I spoke of those little fancies of hers. She was really very kind.'

'She has indeed been very kind to leave you this nice fortune of hers, though I wish old Vaubon had not come in for so large a share. I say, Aline, could not I be a niece, and live under your maternal wing?'

'I should protest against that,' Maurice exclaimed. 'The place would be in two

days too hot to hold you and everyone else. What about the passports, Aline ?'

'"It might have been possible," Vaubon said, "to obtain them for any but émigrés."'

'And Vendeans in the bargain,' Maurice added.

'But I do not quite despair,' Aline said. 'He is the brother-in-law of Parcin.'

'A pretty set !' Maurice ejaculated. 'And to think that your fortune, and even in some sense you yourself, my poor child, should be in the power of this Vaubon ! It makes my blood boil. Did you see these worthy relatives of his ?'

'His nephew for a moment. He turns out to be the young man who showed me some kindness on the dreadful day when I vainly besought his father to have pity on me, on the eve of Aunt Félicie's death.'

Aline then drew her parcel of assignats from her pocket, and begged Maurice to take charge of them. But he asked her to settle their accounts with the landlady, and to pay

the medical expenses of André's illness ; and added :

'We may borrow of you when we see our way to depart. Till then, the less we spend the better.'

But when he left the room André said that he had a few bills incurred before he was taken ill, and that he would be much obliged to her for a loan of one hundred assignats. She gave him the money, and he went out ; but turning back, he said :

'Now, for once and a way, little one, let us have a good supper and a bottle of champagne in honour of your new position, Mdme. la Chatelaine de St. Guy.'

She nodded assent, and tried to smile; but the thought of what her father's joy would have been to know her well-provided for brought tears into her eyes. It was, no doubt, a consolation to be able to help her brothers. She had always been devotedly attached to them, and they were now her all in all. She would have liked to take André with her to Castel St. Guy, but she saw too

well that what Maurice said was true, that the only safe thing for himself and others was to get him across the frontier, and place him out of reach of the perils which his thoughtlessness was sure to lead to.

They all three sat down that evening to a little meal which Aline had taken pains to procure in accordance with what used to be their tastes. They talked of their childish days, at Les Elmes and the house at Moulins, of La Melon and poor Odille. Aline said she hoped they would come to Castel St. Guy, but Maurice thought it better they should, for the present at least, remain where they were. Many little incidents of their childhood were recalled. Those words 'Do you remember?' which have in them such a mixture of pleasure and sadness, were often on their lips. Even Maurice laughed at the recollection of André's pranks, and Aline's contrivances to get him out of his scrapes.

'She was always your protector,' he said.

'And so she will be to the end,' André replied, with more feeling in his manner than

he usually showed. 'If I believed in guardian angels, I should say she was mine.'

'André, do not speak as if you doubted of anything our religion teaches us.'

'Oh, my dear little sister, never mind about that. You are the best of sisters and the greatest of darlings—that is my profession of faith. And now let us make plans for this escape of ours, which I vote for carrying out at once. What is the use of waiting?'

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and a woman appeared, at the sight of whom Aline turned as white as a sheet. This was no other than the daughter-in-law of old Forêt. She came in with a jaunty, impudent air, and said:

'Good-morning. I did not know you were in Lyons, but I saw you in the street and found out where you were living, young citoyenne.'

The tone with which this was said made Maurice inwardly writhe, and André bound on his chair as if about to spring at the speaker. Aline caught hold of his hand under the table-

cloth and squeezed it in an expressive manner. Then rising, she went up to Mdme. Brutus Forêt, and said :

'How are you, citoyenne ?'

'Oh, I am always well, and so is Brutus. The old people are still in what was your apartment. You have not been to see them, I suppose ?'

She kept glancing at the two young men with the look of a cat, or rather a tiger, spying a prey.

'I am here only for a short time on business,' Aline answered.

'And you have business with these gentlemen, then ?' Mdme. Brutus replied, with an insulting smile. 'Oh, ah, so young aristocrats condescend to have lovers !'

Maurice hid his face in his hands and commanded his feelings. It was not his own life only that was at stake ; that thought kept him motionless. He tried not to listen to what the woman said. He leant on the table and stopped his ears. She went on in a still more impertinent strain. André snatched a plate

and flung it at her head. It hit her, and her nose bled. The rage of the angry creature was horrible to see, and the words she uttered too dreadful to write. She poured out threats and curses for some minutes, and then marched out of the house, calling the girl and her brothers traitors, monsters, enemies of the Republic, and vowing vengeance against them.

'It is all over with us, I suppose,' Maurice said. 'Who is this woman, Aline?'

'The wife of Brutus Forêt, one of the agents of the Committee. Oh, André, André! why did you assault her?'

'The wretch insulted you. It drove me mad. I am sorry—oh, so sorry!—for both of you. But I could not help it. Maurice, forgive me.'

'There is no use in reverting to what cannot be undone,' Maurice quietly said; and Aline, seeing that André was weeping, threw her arms round his neck, and said:

'I think the plate did not make any difference. I knew the woman, and I saw at once what she was come about. I am sure

she meant to denounce us before you struck her.'

'In that case, I am glad I did strike her. I only wish I had killed the wretch. If we escape, I shall track her like an evil beast, and when the reaction comes—as come it will—she shall not escape me.'

Aline withdrew her arm from André's neck, and sighed. Then they all ejaculated at the same time:

'And now what is to be done?'

They resolved to abandon their lodging, and each to seek a refuge in different houses. There were people in low life they could trust, and Aline insisted on going to ask two of them—an old tradesman they knew well, and the mistress of the tavern near the river, who had for some time hidden their poor father when he left Lyons—to give her brothers a shelter for one night and day. On the ensuing night, with or without passports, they were resolved to depart.

'But where will you go?' they asked.

'As soon as possible to Castel St. Guy.

Vaubon will arrange it for me. In the meantime I can go to Mdme. de Vergy.'

This was a lady well known for her zeal and humanity. She was a great friend of Mdme. de Bellecise. To her, Aline went in the first place. She put her bonnet and cloak on, and set out on her walk, agreeing with her brothers that they should wait for her in a neighbouring street, this being less dangerous than to remain an hour longer where they were. If she succeeded in housing them safely for the night, she meant to meet Vaubon in the morning at the place they had agreed upon, and make another desperate effort to obtain the passports on which their fate might depend.

She flew rather than walked to Mdme. de Vergy's house, and met with the kindest reception. She had a hiding-place in her garret which had never been discovered, and she begged that Aline would bring to her both her brothers. This would be very much better, she said, than to take them to a shop or a public-house. Aline she would

lodge in a little room next her own, and so they would remain together till the moment of their departure. This was cheering, and with a heart somewhat lightened, Aline hastened back to the place where her brothers were to have met her. She waited a few minutes, but they did not appear. She then hurried to their lodging. The door was open; she rushed up the stairs, and into the little sitting-room, where they had been sitting together an hour before. It was empty, and so was the bedroom. She was not left long in suspense. The landlady—a kind-hearted woman, had followed her upstairs. She saw at once, from her face, that something terrible had happened.

'Where are they?' she gasped.

'Alas! poor child——'

'Are they arrested?'

'Yes; only a few minutes after you had left the house, as they were walking down the street.'

Aline sat down, stunned by the blow —trying in vain to move, or even to

think. The landlady brought her a glass of water. She drank it, thought for a moment, and then said :

'Where have they been taken ?'

'To the Hôtel de Ville.'

It was hopeless, then. For a moment she had thought that it had been perhaps only for the assault on Mdme. Brutus Forêt that they had been arrested, though how there could have been time for her to make her complaint and summon the police she could hardly conceive. But for an offence of that sort it would not have been to the Hôtel de Ville they would have been committed. The lateness of the hour made it impossible to do anything that night. She settled the landlady's account, and went to Mdme. de Vergy's house. It was well for her that when that lady said, 'Where are they ?' a flood of tears came to her relief.

She lay down without undressing, and counted the hours till the morning. She had scarcely a hope, and yet it seemed to her impossible that her brothers were going to

die. She could not think it, could not believe it; she could not even feel resigned to it. She clenched her hands with a wild agony quite different from the anguish her aunt's death had caused her. What was she to do? There was but one straw to cling to —Vaubon and his fearful relatives. There she must go, at all risks, as soon as the hour would allow of it. Till then, she paced up and down before the Hôtel de Ville, as she had done some months before; but not feeling as if she were the same person. It seemed as if she had lived ages since then, the tone of her mind was so different. Then she could pray—now, the power to do so seemed to have forsaken her. It was not so in reality. There is a dumb, mental suffering which may be the very essence of prayer if only the heart is raised upward.

As she was passing and repassing the entrance-gate of the prison on the fatal left side, she became conscious that another person was doing the same thing, an elderly woman who at last stopped and leant against the

door. Her eyes were fixed on the clock. Taught by experience to notice the most trifling circumstances, Aline, who had been watching her, guessed from this that she had a permission to enter, and was waiting the hour when the gate would be unbarred. She went up to her and whispered :

'Are you going in ?'

The stranger nodded assent.

'You have a permission ?'

'Yes.'

'May I follow you closely, and try to get in?'

The woman looked doubtful. But after scrutinising Aline's face, she said :

'You may try.' Then she added : 'I have paid high for the permission. If you have money you may perhaps succeed.'

Aline had a handful of assignats.

'If I fail, will you have the charity—if you can—to find out for me if two young men of the name of Gérard were brought here yesterday ?'

'I will try ; but you will have to wait a little.'

At that moment the prison-door opened : the stranger entered, produced her permission ; Aline followed. The porter laid hold of her arm. She thrust half her assignats into his hands. He called out in a scolding manner to another man to stand back, and placed himself between Aline and him. She pressed forward and got in. The prisoners were in the hall where she had last seen her aunt. She looked round. She glided through the groups of men and women, young and old, that filled it. Her head felt giddy from the strain ; but still she searched. At last, sitting on the floor with his head buried in his hands, she perceived André.

'My darling!' she said, laying her hand on his shoulder.

He looked up. His face was livid, and there was something terrible in the expression of his eyes. For some moments he could not, or would not, speak. At last, in a hoarse whisper, he said :

'I will not be pitied ; and, above all, I will not be preached to. Maurice has been

trying his hand at it. I have forbidden him to come near me. So now, say good-bye quietly, Aline, and run away.'

'André—my own André, do not speak to me in that way!' the poor girl said, wringing her hands.

'Be thankful I do speak in this way. If I did not control myself, you would tremble at what I should say. Maurice could not endure to hear me blaspheming, as he calls it; but that is the only thing that gives me relief. Oh that I had died on the battle-field—oh that I had never been born—oh for one hour of revenge! I should welcome death if I had freed the earth of one of those monsters who, if there happens to be a hell, would——'

Aline placed her hand on his mouth. 'André, do not utter such words; who knows but I may save you still?'

The wild, haggard blue eyes turned upon her with a wistful, painful glance.

'André, nothing is impossible. The God whom I believe in and love sometimes works miracles. You cannot have lost all faith in

Him, though despair is now maddening you. Dearest brother, just say an "Our Father," and I will go, weak creature that I am, with a strength not my own, to see what I can do for you.'

'I cannot pray; the words would choke me.'

Aline, regardless of all around, laid her head against his breast, and raised her eyes, full of tears, to his. She saw his lips moving.

'You must pray for me,' she said, 'if you do not pray for yourself. I still hope to save you, if God helps me.'

'I will believe in Him if He does.'

'I am going, André; say something kind to me.'

'Oh, my poor little one, what a fate is yours!'

Two big tears rolled down his cheeks. Aline kissed him, rose, and sought her other brother, who had been gravely and sadly watching her interview with André.

'My darling,' he said, 'my only hope has been in you. Our poor André is wild

with anger. He fights against his fate. *I* could gladly accept death if he was resigned to it; but to hear him blaspheme destroys my peace. I do not go near him; for nothing I can say is of any use. My Aline, this is a sad business. Poor little sister, I have been commending you to the care of Christ's Mother—the Mother of orphans, the consoler of the afflicted. You have been a good brave child, Aline, and God will reward you. I wish you would leave Lyons at once. You are not safe; and you can do nothing for us. We must look it in the face; there is not the least hope. We have been recognised: we are known to be émigrés, Vendeans, and have been arrested as such. Do not be afraid—no one hears us; and besides, all in this room are in the same boat—a bad one enough. We are all doomed, and have nothing to do but to prepare for death. It can serve no purpose for you to remain in Lyons; and it will be a consolation to me in my last moments to think that you have left it. After all, Aline, there is nothing

so dreadful in death, if we meet it bravely. I know André will show no weakness at the last, though he so desperately clings to life. Would he had died on his sick-bed! It was foolish to pray, as I did, for his recovery.'

'No, no, we cannot tell; God only knows. Oh, Maurice, I never loved you as I do now.'

At that moment an order was given to clear the prison from all visitors, and a general movement separated Aline from her brother.

They had not time for parting words. Both felt it better that it should be so.

She descended the stairs, as on the eve of her aunt's death, with a strange feeling of going all over again what she had suffered then, and walked as if in a dream.

Vaubon was at home, and she saw by his manner when he came into the room that he was aware of what had happened. He looked disturbed—almost agitated.

'You know,' she said, 'what I have come about. Can you, oh, can you help me?'

He sighed, shook his head, and said:

'It would be deceiving you to say I could. Those unfortunate young men—your brothers—belong to a class which never meet with mercy from the Committee. They have been guilty of a double offence in their eyes, and, if they appear before the tribunal, must inevitably be condemned.'

'You say, if they appear. Is there the least chance of their not being tried?'

Vaubon hesitated, and said:

'I am afraid not.'

'Your relatives, are they not all-powerful?'

'My brother-in-law is inflexible. It was with the greatest difficulty, when the news of your brother's arrest reached us this morning, that his son and I prevented him from denouncing you as their accomplice. It would be useless to attempt more. I am deeply grieved for you, Mademoiselle des Elmes.'

'Would he see me?'

'I do not know. I can ask him. Shall I do so?'

'Yes.'

Aline remained alone. She remembered how she had pursued that man in the street, and clung to him. Now she was again going to supplicate him. She tried to still the beating of her heart, to steady her voice, to compose her face.

One hour she waited in this suspense, hearing voices in the adjoining room, doors opening and shutting, steps on the stairs.

At last Vaubon reappeared. He looked still more agitated than before.

'Parcin will see you. I think he is going to make some sort of proposal to you.'

Aline started up. There was a ray of hope then.

'But, no doubt, a totally unacceptable one. I have no hand in it, only so far, I will say, that Hypolite is not quite such a one as you might imagine. There are good points about him.'

'He will help me, then, with his father?'

'His father has desired him to keep out of the way. He wishes to see you alone.'

'Let me go, then.'

'Whatever he says, try to command yourself. Say and do nothing rashly. Ask for time to consider.'

Scarcely hearing, and not understanding what Vaubon was saying, Aline followed him, and entered the adjoining room.

By a table, littered with papers, sat the friend and accomplice of Collot d'Herbois, patting his dog with one hand, and with the other making pencil-marks on a manuscript. He allowed the young girl to stand a moment unnoticed, then, turning towards her, he said :

'I know what you have got to say. You are the sister of those traitors arrested last night. Aye, you do well to cry ; but it should be over their guilt, not their punishment. They have deserved death, and they will die.'

'You could save them. Oh, pity—pity me, citoyen, and save them !'

She clasped her hands together, and bent her head imploringly.

Parcin looked at the small figure, the face so lovely in its sorrow, and a sort of smile hovered on his lips.

'There would only be one condition on which I should stir in the matter, and I suppose *Mdlle. des Elmes* would not take it into consideration.'

'Anything, anything in the world, I would do.'

'Indeed! Well, my son Hypolite has taken a fancy—a desperate fancy—to you, young citoyenne. Accept his hand, and the day after you become his wife, for the sake of my daughter-in-law, I shall obtain the release of her brothers, traitors as they are. In the meantime, if you pledge your word to keep your promise, they will be removed from the Hôtel de Ville to the prison of St. Joseph. If this arrangement does not suit you, they will be guillotined to-morrow.'

If we did not know that such offers were more than once made during the reign of terror to the unhappy relatives of its victims

who happened to be possessed of good fortunes, it would be difficult to realise that so cruel an option could have been deliberately presented to high-born, refined, and delicately minded girls, and that they were, in some instances, accepted with a courage and a despair which imagination can hardly picture.*

Aline remembered Vaubon's words, 'Ask for time to consider.' She understood them now, and almost mechanically acted upon them. The very intensity of the strain enabled her to be calm. She slowly said :

'Will you allow me time to reflect on your proposal ?'

'Oh, certainly. Return here at five this evening, if you like. You are quite at liberty to choose your own course. I will even go so far as to say that though you are amenable to justice for consorting with rebels and traitors, you shall be suffered to escape

* In Madame Bourdon's 'Nouvelles Historiques,' there is a short tale, 'Un Mariage en '93,' founded on a similar fact.

the penalty due to such offences; but, as for your brothers, nothing—I repeat it—can save them but a connection with true patriots, which would form a plea for sparing their lives.'

Aline found Vaubon waiting for her at the door. He seemed afraid of speaking to her.

'Can I see you alone?' she said.

They returned to the room where she had so long waited. When there, she asked him in the same cold, quiet manner:

'Will you tell me the truth? Is this arrangement the only possible means of saving my brothers?'

'I am obliged to say that it is. Parcin's passion is money.'

'Good heavens! If money will suffice, draw up deeds, papers—what you will. I am ready to make over to him every penny I have in the world. Oh, go to him, tell him he can have Castel St. Guy—all, all, everything I have.'

'Alas, that will not do. His passion

indeed is money, but he is actuated in this matter by another powerful instinct.'

'What instinct?'

'That of treading under foot aristocratic distinctions, and practically asserting the equality which, as a Republican, he proclaims.'

As he spoke, Vaubon avoided meeting the eyes of Aline. She made a last effort.

'You said that your nephew had good qualities—will you not go to him and appeal to whatever there may be noble or good in his nature? Surely he must shrink from forcing an unhappy girl into becoming his wife by this horrible compulsion!'

'I can do so, and I might perhaps succeed; but I must remind you, Mdlle. des Elmes, that in that case Parcin will not interfere to save your brothers. If Hypolite knows that you abhor the idea of marrying him, he may indeed renounce all pretensions to your hand. But this will change in nothing his father's determination.'

Aline felt like a hunted animal engaged in a path without an issue. She saw that Vaubon either would not, or could not, help her. It was one of those positions where, on either side, the prospect was so dreadful, that it seemed equally impossible to face one or the other. Yet she must do so. She must resolve. Time pressed—three hours for consideration, and then the choice must be made. She walked towards the door and said, as she left the house, to Vaubon, who accompanied her:

'I shall return at five.'

Then she went to the house of Mdme. de Vergy—not to ask advice, that she too truly felt no one on earth could give her. She had to take her own line—to act on her own responsibility. Who would have dared to say to her, 'Let your brothers die,' or, 'Become the wife of Parcin's son'? She alone could decide. But to tell a friend what she did decide—to have a woman's sympathy whilst making up her mind to the most tremendous sacrifice a woman can be called

upon to make—was what she needed, and therefore it was that she knocked at the door of the house where she had been received the day before with such generous kindness. Mdme. de Vergy exclaimed when Aline entered:

'My dear Mdlle. des Elmes, what have you obtained? Is there any hope?'

A shiver ran through the poor girl's frame, as she answered, 'Yes, there is hope,' but with a look of such unutterable misery that Mdme. de Vergy thought she must have misunderstood her.

She took Aline's burning hand in hers, and looked at her anxiously.

'I have to pay a price for their lives worse than death.'

Then she told her friend what was the alternative offered to her acceptance. Mdme. de Vergy breathed a deep sigh: the terrible fate of that innocent girl rose before her, and filled her with horror. She could hardly speak—she did not know what to say to Aline. She could only draw her to herself

and kiss the pale little face, more touching in the calmness of its despair than if it had been wild with grief. Aline laid her cheek against her breast, and said :

'I cannot let them die.'

'But when they come to know what you have done to save them, will not their sorrow be worse than death ?'

'It will be a dreadful shock to them. Maurice will scarcely get over it. Poor André feels things less deeply ; he will be miserable at first, but more quickly consoled. Perhaps I may die before they hear of it. God will make me able to bear my fate, or if it is too dreadful, He will take me to Himself.'

Tears streamed down Mdme. de Vergy's face.

'If Maurice alone were concerned, I should hesitate. I think, as you do, that what he will have to suffer may be worse than death. I think he is prepared to leave this world. He believes. He hopes. He prays. . . . But André ! Oh, it is for André I offer up

this sacrifice! To save more than his life—to save his soul from a Godless death—to prevent his dying angry with God and with men. And oh, my dear friend, if anything will win him back to the faith of bygone years, if anything will cure his wildness, will it not be the price paid for his life? I saw this morning that a ray of hope softened him. He said he would believe in God if He helped me to save them. Surely the memory of those words will abide with him when he knows how I have stood between him and death!'

'But when will this dreadful marriage take place?'

'As soon as possible, for my brothers will not be released till it is accomplished.'

'But how, and where?'

A difficulty had occurred to Mdme. de Vergy which had not yet crossed Aline's mind.

'You can only be married at the Mairie, and that is no marriage at all.'

Aline turned as white as a sheet. She

could make up her mind to become the wife, but not the mistress, of Hypolite Parcin.

'No, not to save them can I do a sinful act. O my God, is it Thy will, after all, that they should die?'

She hid her face in her hands, then suddenly rose and said:

'Good-bye—pray for me.'

'But, my child, where shall you sleep to-night?'

'I shall go to Fontaine, to the Chozières. Whatever is to be my fate, I will await it there.'

At five o'clock, Aline was once more in the parlour of Parcin's house. Vaubon was anxiously looking out for her. She did not keep him long in suspense.

'Will you,' she said, 'inform your brother-in-law that I am here? If he agrees to it, I should wish to see your nephew alone, and to give him my answer.'

Vaubon came back, and said:

'He consents to what you ask, but I am obliged to repeat his words—he insists upon it.

"Tell the young citoyenne that if it is her intention to work upon the feelings of a man in love with her, and obtain from him a reversal of the conditions I have laid down, it will be of no use. It is with me, and not with him, that the contract was entered into. I shall not ratify any concessions he might make."'

Aline said nothing in answer, but asked Vaubon to procure her a conveyance to take her to Fontaine as soon as her interview with his nephew should be over. He offered to take her there, and though she shrunk from his companionship, she accepted his offer—the lateness of the hour seemed to necessitate it.

'Shall I then send Hypolite to you?'

She bent her head in assent, sat down near the table, and placed a chair at some distance from her for the man she was expecting. She had prayed ardently on her way there, to do what was most perfect in her present unhappy position. She had asked two things of God in return for her tremendous sacrifice

—André's conversion, and that she might never see M. Alexandre again after becoming the wife of another man; but that every suffering, every agony she might have to endure, might bring down on him blessings, for time and for eternity.

The door opened, and Hypolite Parcin came in. He was much the most agitated of the two. She rose, and bowed to him in a gentle and courteous manner. He evidently did not know how to begin the conversation. It was strange how the orator of the clubs, the fierce Terrorist, stood in awe of the young girl who, at his mercy, awaited what he would say. At last, he muttered something about the hope that she had favourably considered a proposal of his father's which deeply concerned him.

She answered with her eyes fixed on the ground:

'I am prepared, citoyen, to accept your father's conditions. He has pledged himself to save the lives of my two brothers if I become your wife. On my side, not in the

letter only, but in the spirit, will I fulfil my part in the contract. I will try to be a good wife to you.'

The man she addressed was taken by surprise. He had looked upon his father's measures with regard to his marriage with a young aristocrat as a triumph over that detested class, and had approached his unhappy bride in a spirit of defiance. He thought her the prettiest little creature he had ever beheld, and was very much in love with her; but expecting that she would either scorn and insult him, or else use blandishments to obtain from him the boon she sought without paying its price, it puzzled him to find her speaking so gently and respectfully to him, whom he felt in his heart she had good reason to hate. He seized her hand; she trembled from head to foot when he kissed it, but controlled herself, and did not draw it away with violence.

'I feel rather exhausted,' she said, and leant her head on her hands.

Hypolite rushed out of the room, and came

back with wine, which he offered to her. She sipped a little of it, and then said:

'Now I have conditions to make with you —may I?' She raised her eyes for the first time to his face — those wonderfully soft, pleading eyes, so different in their pure beauty from any eyes he had ever known.

'Any you please, citoyenne—provided you do not ask me to give you up.'

'On the contrary, what I ask will bind me to you for ever by an indissoluble tie. I must be married by a Catholic priest, and one who has not taken the civil oath——'

Hypolite's countenance fell, and a dark expression crossed his face.

'What you ask, citoyenne, is impossible. How can you suppose that a true patriot could submit to such foolish prejudices! Besides, these fanatics lurk in hiding-places, and dare not show their faces in the light of day. It would indeed be a good joke if I, who have denounced and brought them to justice, should stand before one of them to be married. No, no, citoyenne; you must renounce these follies.

It is at the Mairie we must be united ; or if you insist upon it, in one of the churches served by a priest faithful to the Republic. This is the utmost concession I can make in deference to your superstition.'

'In that case my brothers must die. God's will be done. Perhaps He will grant me to die also. Farewell, citoyen.'

'Stop, do not go. Listen to reason. Do you not know that what you ask would be a matter of life and death for you and for me ? It is preposterous, impossible—sheer madness.'

'I do not ask that the ceremony should be public ; no one need know of its having taken place. This is what I propose. I have humble friends living in a village at a short distance from this town. I am going to them from hence. If you will come there on the night before the day appointed for the marriage at the Mairie, a priest I know will secretly unite us, and, believe me, citoyen, what I said just now is true. If I was married only at the Mairie, I should not look upon

myself as really your wife; and if circumstances occurred which would release me from a tie the validity of which I do not acknowledge, I should feel myself free to leave you. Whereas if a priest of the Catholic Church marries us, I shall be bound to you before God as well as man, until death parts us.'

As she said these last words, Aline wept. It was strangely terrible to seek so earnestly a thraldom long as life—an indissoluble union with the Terrorist, Hypolite Parcin.

He was moved by her tears, still more by the fear of losing her, for every glance of her eyes, every tone of her voice, every gesture of his unhappy bride, made him more passionately in love. He thought awhile, walked up and down the room—stopped at last, and said:

'Can I rely on that complete secrecy you hold out?'

'I give you my word of it. And can *I* rely also on your discretion with regard to my

poor friends, and to the priest who will perform the ceremony?'

'Yes, citoyenne; I have been, and am, a bitter enemy of the reactionaries. I would bring to the scaffold every foe of the Republic —every conspirator against the nation; but I am neither false nor treacherous, and I would rather lay my head myself upon the block than deceive one who trusted me.'

Aline felt that he was speaking sincerely, and said so. 'Another favour,' she added, 'I have to ask you. I earnestly wish to see my brothers before their departure. Can you obtain for me permission to do so?'

Hypolite said he would endeavour to meet her wishes, but that he must speak to his father.

A sudden thought made her ask to see Vaubon.

He came in, looking painfully embarrassed; but whether there was remorse mingled with that uneasiness she could not tell.

'Sir,' Aline said, 'you have shown me kindness in more than one instance. Your

attachment to Mdlle. de Marsoulier assures me that I may rely on your answering truly the question which I wish to put to you. Your brother-in-law refuses to order the release of my brothers until I am married to his son. Is he capable of breaking his word to me; and can I rely not only on his having the will, but also the power, to save them?'

'I am quite certain,' was Vaubon's reply, 'that, ill as you must think of him, and, indeed, no one deplores more than I do the excesses into which a fanatical patriotism has led both him and his son, they are neither of them capable of deceit and treachery; nor is it doubtful that he can do what he promises. I know that, as President of the Tribunal, he has power to order the liberation of any prisoners not yet tried and condemned.' He paused and added: 'I shall take care that, in the settlement of your fortune, a just attention shall be paid to your interests. My brother-in-law is, I am sorry to say, avaricious. His son, however, will support

me in my efforts to make sure that your fortune shall be fairly dealt with.'

The door opened at that moment, and Parcin came in. Aline's heart sank within her. He looked at her in a complacent manner.

'You have made my son happy,' he said; 'and I will do something for you in return. If you will swear to fulfil your engagement, I shall trust you, and those two young rebels —your brothers—shall be released to-morrow.'

Aline's eyes filled with tears.

'I swear,' she said, 'that I will abide by the promise I have made;' and then she added, 'You will also give my brothers passports, for without that, liberty would be vain.'

'Hypolite,' he said, 'shall accompany you to St. Joseph's, with the orders for their release, and their passports. Feigned names will be given, but my signature is enough. You can rest assured of their safety.'

Aline's face flushed violently.

'I beg of you, citoyen, that your brother-in-law—not your son—may accompany me to the prison.'

'As you please. I thought young damsels liked to be escorted by their lovers; but if you prefer Vaubon's protection, so be it.'

She thanked him. There was something inexpressibly sad and touching in her demeanour towards the brutal tyrant who had blighted her young life for his own selfish ends.

Vaubon felt his eyes moistening. He led her to the conveyance which had been for some time waiting for them, and they drove to Fontaine, neither of them hardly speaking a word. She could not but think of the night when she had walked along that road, supported by the arm of one whom she now never hoped, never wished to see again on earth.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TABLES TURNED.

MADAME CHOZIÈRE received Aline with open arms, and Vaubon went away. Her exhaustion was such that she asked to go to bed at once. Madeleine undressed her with the tenderness of a mother, and sat down by her side.

'Do not try to speak to-night,' she said. 'To-morrow you will tell me all. I know by your looks, and what M. Vaubon said just now, that something important, and I am afraid sad, has happened to you.'

'I must speak to you to-night about it, for early to-morrow I have to go to Lyons, and

I hope you will be able to come with me. You received my letter announcing to you Mdlle. de Marsoulier's death ?'

'Yes ; and M. Vaubon tells me she has left you the greatest part of her fortune.'

'Yes ; God only knows if it has been a blessing to me or a misfortune. It enables me to save the lives of my brothers ; but I have to pay, in return, a fearful price. Oh, Madeleine, I can hardly bear to speak of it ; and yet, O my God, my God ! I have to do it.'

Then she told her friend the whole terrible history, and ended with these words :

'Could I have refused to save them ? Was it not better to sacrifice myself ?'

Madeleine could hardly utter. She remained silent for a moment, and then said :

'We must pray ardently ; you may yet escape this dreadful fate.'

'Do not give me any such hope, Madeleine. I dare not think escape possible. I look the future steadily in the face. I renounce all idea of happiness in this world, except that

of hearing that André has become a good Christian. I think God will grant me that, in return for what I suffer, and shall suffer till death releases me from my bondage. Oh, Madeleine, Madeleine! this room reminds me so much of last winter. Poor Mdlle. de Saurac! I then fancied that a more terrible fate than hers could not be imagined. I little thought that I should so soon think it a happy one in comparison with mine. Now tell me about a priest to perform the ceremony. Can you get one?'

'The Abbé Rosière is at my sister's cottage. He could come, if you feel sure Hypolite Parcin will not betray him.'

'I feel confident he won't. Vaubon assures me I can trust him, and I quite believe it.'

'Now, dearest, try to sleep a little, if you can. I will go at break of day and speak to the abbé.'

Aline closed her eyes, but soon opened them again.

'Can you come with me to-morrow to the

prison? I am to take there the order for my brothers' release, and their passports. They must not know anything of what I have told you till they are out of the country and I am—married!'

'Yes; I will go with you—to the entrance-gate, at any rate. I do not think I could bear to see your brothers, knowing the price you pay for their lives.'

She kissed Aline, and put out the lamp, but sat on by her side. The moon was shining through the small window-panes and checkering the floor; it's light gave a ghastly paleness to the face of the young girl. She was sleeping at last, forgetting for awhile her miserable fate.

Madeleine's heart was aching with grief and pity. She prayed for a long time in silence, and then rested for a short time.

On the following morning both of them went by the boat to Lyons.

At twelve, Aline, accompanied by Madeleine, was at the door of Parcin's house. Hypolite and Vaubon were expecting her.

The young man's eyes beamed with joy when he caught sight of her; but he seemed restless and anxious. He said his father wished to speak with her before she went to the prison.

She was shown into his room. He received her very kindly, and said that he now looked upon her as his daughter.

She thought of her own brave, tender, noble-hearted father, of what he would have felt had he heard *that* man calling her *his* daughter, and her blood ran cold in her veins.

He then said that Hypolite was his only son—the child of the only woman he had ever loved; that to see him as happy as he was in marrying her was to him an inexpressible joy. He hoped, in time, she would be happy too, for Hypolite adored her, and he had so much virtue and sensibility that a woman was certain of finding in him a devoted and tender husband.

He spoke apparently with real feeling, and, to Aline's astonishment, seemed deeply affected.

'Can this be the man,' she thought, 'who bereaved wives of their husbands, children of their parents—who doomed to death hundreds of innocent victims, including my own aunt Félicie? Does he speak of virtue?—does he dare utter the word sensibility?'

She did know then how that jargon was ever on the lips of the Terrorists; and, on the other hand, how many of these deluded men deceived themselves into thinking that the blood they shed by torrents was sacrificed for their country and people, and felt no more remorse for it than the victor on the field of battle.

Parcin then asked her if she objected to being married on the following day. Pressing business, he said, obliged him to urge this. Aline thought it safest to make no difficulties. She said she should be ready. He opened the door and told her that Vaubon had all the necessary papers. He hesitated a little, and then said:

'You will try to love Hypolite?'

She answered, 'When I am his wife it will be my duty to do so.'

The young man was watching for her; they went into the front parlour.

'We are to be married to-morrow, at the Mairie,' she quietly said, 'but only on condition that you come to-night to the Maison Chozière, at Fontaine, and that we are united by a priest.'

'I shall be there, without fail. Oh, if you knew how I worship you! These are strange nuptials. But, believe me, it is my father that forced your will—not I.'

'Would you then have released me?' she said, in a trembling voice.

'I could not have done so and saved your brothers; but to speak the truth, I am so violently in love with you, that I would sooner die myself than give you up.'

Aline sighed, and said, 'I shall expect you this evening.'

Then, turning to Vaubon, she made a sign that they should go, and they drove to the prison.

On their way there, he produced her brother's passports, and told her that he had ordered a carriage to be in readiness to convey them wherever they wished. It was understood that this was to be to the frontier of Switzerland. The driver was an honest man, who could be trusted and would ask no questions. At the same time he handed to her a further sum of money on account of what was owing to her from the estate of Castel St. Guy. She could not but feel thankful for the measures he had taken and the help he afforded her.

Arrived at the conciergerie, Vaubon spoke to the head-gaoler at St. Joseph's, and showed him the order of release, signed by the President of the Tribunal. He requested him to conduct the young citoyenne into the ward where her brothers were confined. Madeleine waited below.

When Aline entered, the sound of laughter met her ears. A strange one in such a place! And though she had been familiar enough with prison-life during her aunt's

captivity, still it surprised her to see the animation and even gaiety of that crowd of men and women, whose numbers were thinned every day by executions, and every day replenished by fresh arrests. She caught sight at once of her brothers, sitting on some trunks, playing at cards with two men, and surrounded by others watching the game. The gaoler approached this group, and called out 'Les Citoyens Gérard.' Aline saw André start up, give his cards to a bystander, and heard him say :

'Here, Marsan, play out my cards; good-bye to you all, citoyens and citoyennes.'

Maurice rose also ; and then both of them saw Aline. André seized her in his arms. She disengaged herself from his embrace, took one hand of each of them, and gasped out the words :

'You are released! Here are your passports, with feigned names, signed by Parcin; a carriage is waiting for you below. Take this purse of assignats,

and make the best of your way to the frontier.'

Maurice pressed Aline's hand against his heart. André looked bewildered. The news spread amongst the prisoners that the two Gérards were set at liberty. Their friends crowded around the young men to wish them joy, and great excitement reigned amongst the captives. Wild hopes were awakened that their deliverance might prove the harbinger of other reprieves.

When Aline and her brothers came out into the open air, she felt faint and giddy.

'Come with us!' they exclaimed. 'For God's sake do, Aline.'

Maurice was going to lift her into the carriage.

'No; I must go to Castel St. Guy,' she said. 'Let me know as soon as you can where a letter will find you, and I will write. But lose no time now.'

'We cannot leave you here alone,' André said.

'And perhaps in danger of your life,' Maurice added.

Aline turned to Vaubon, and said:

'This gentleman will take care of me. He is the agent of our late aunt. He will assure you that I am in no danger of my life.'

Vaubon stepped forward and corroborated her assertion.

'But will you soon take her out of this horrible town? Will you see her safely at Castel St. Guy?'

'As soon as I possibly can.'

Then the brothers and sister kissed each other once more, and the young men got into the carriage. Vaubon consulted Maurice as to the directions to be given to the coachman. Whilst this was transacting, Aline, on the other side, was speaking to André, who was literally stunned by the change from impending death to life and freedom. She put her face close to his, and said:

'My own darling brother, for whom I have shed so many tears from my childhood upwards, for my sake be a good Christian. You

said that if God helped me to save your life you would believe in Him, and you must serve Him too. Keep your promise, André. Oh, Maurice! Oh, André—God bless you both!'

She uttered these words with passionate tenderness, and then drew back, made a sign for the coachman to go on, and stood looking at the vehicle till it disappeared. When it was out of sight, she fell down on the pavement. Madeleine and Vaubon raised her, and supported her into the carriage which had brought them to the prison.

'Where will you go?' he asked.

'To Fontaine,' she said.

Not even to Madeleine was she able to speak during that drive. Now that her brothers were saved—now that the Parcins had fulfilled their part of the terrible contract, her own fate inspired her with greater terror than she had yet experienced. When they reached the cottage, she wished to be alone, and went through the garden, gay with summer flowers, to her favourite bench near the broken arch. She had loved that spot in

her days of brief joy and deep sorrow, but the grief which seemed so bitter when M. Alexandre had vanished as it were from her life, was sweet and peaceful in comparison with her present misery. There she remained, looking like a marble image, her eyes fixed on the ground, her hands tightly clasped together, afraid to think, afraid to move, as if even a change of position would involve fresh suffering. Madeleine had to use gentle constraint to bring her in and make her eat; and then, by the window, she resumed that silent, motionless attitude, until it became quite dark. She then grew restless, and trembled at every sound. About ten o'clock, a low knock at the door was heard. A sickening feeling came over her, but it was the Abbé Rosière, not Hypolite Parcin, who had arrived. When she saw him, the tears that had not fallen before flowed in torrents. Madeleine had told him the whole story. He pitied the poor child from the depth of his heart, and sought to comfort her in the best way he could.

'Great trials,' he said, 'call for more than common virtue ; and from what I have heard of you from these good people, young as you are, you have already corresponded to that call. It is seldom, indeed, that one of your age has been placed in so painful a position, or been forced to choose between two such terrible alternatives. But Providence has destined you—I fully believe it—to be the means of saving others. I would have you look upon your fate in that light, and pray and strive to fulfil with courage a strange and high mission. A priest from Bordeaux, whom I met a few days ago, was telling me how many persons have been saved there through the influence of the woman who has married Tallien, the tyrant of that city. She has made herself the idol of the mob by giving in to all the follies of the Revolution—making speeches in the clubs, driving about with a tri-coloured cockade in her hat, presiding at all the popular festivals, but at the same time using her influence over her husband and his satellites to mitigate the terror, and obtain the

release of numberless prisoners. Although led astray by the wild theories and passions of these evil days, her woman's heart and merciful disposition have earned for her the popular designation of our Lady of Good Help. Now, my child, you are a Christian, and a devoted one, I know. May not God have assigned you a still higher part? By your virtues, by your gentle endurance of a life of pain and sorrow, you will gain—we may hope it—great influence over Hypolite Parcin, and who knows that through him you may not rescue some of the victims of this reign of terror, and mitigate the sufferings of others.'

'If there was only some good in him!' Aline murmured. 'But, O Father! can there be good in one who has been the friend and the tool of Fouquier-Tinville and Collot d'Herbois?'

'Yes, my child; it is not impossible. Some of these men have been seduced by wild theories, by a passion for setting up an ideal state of things which nothing could sustain but terrorism. They will not, they dare not

abandon it. They have been led on step by step into their sanguinary excesses, persuading themselves that they are thus advancing the future happiness of the human race. I am not speaking of such a brute as Marat, but of men who have retained certain notions of morality and humanity, which they try to reconcile with what is partly forced upon them by others, partly dictated by their own fears and their own ambition. Camille Desmoulins, for instance, one of the most bloody of the Jacobins, suddenly shrunk back from the work he was doing, advocated clemency in his journal, and was executed in consequence. I saw the other day a person who had received a letter from Mdlle. de Marconnay, a lady in Paris, who lives only for doing good, and who, for the sake of others, maintains friendly relations with Robespierre. She says that this man is an enigma. She believes that he is watching for an opportunity of stemming the course of these massacres, and in the meantime he and his friends meet in little social parties, and make plans for leading patriarchal lives in

rural retirement when France is happy and peaceful. Danton struggled to free himself from the obligation of carrying out the political murders he had provoked, and which at last affected him so much that when he looked at the Seine, it seemed to him as if it ran blood. I tell you these things, my child, in order that you may not assume that the young man you are about to marry must be hopelessly wicked, devoid of every good feeling, actuated by nothing but bad passions. Watch for every approach to a generous impulse—never show him aversion or contempt.'

'O Father, that will be so difficult!'

'I know it will, but is virtue easy? Does not the kingdom of heaven suffer violence? Are there none on whom you wish to draw down God's blessing by more than common acts of heroism? Courage then, and confidence. Take up your cross, not languidly, not despondingly. Grasp it with a firm hand, and carry it with patient strength. It is to me a most painful duty to unite you to Hypolite Parcin, but I feel sustained by my strong

belief, which I want you to share, that it is not in vain—not without a high object—that this destiny has been assigned to you.'

These words made a deep impression on Aline, and though she trembled when Madeleine came in and said that the person they expected was arrived, her composure was greater than could have been expected.

The Abbé Rosière had desired Madeleine to prepare everything for Mass in the barn. He knew he was running a great risk, but he had weighed the danger, and determined to incur it. He went to vest himself. Aline asked Madeleine if she had offered Hypolite refreshment.

'Yes,' she said. 'He has had a glass of wine and a piece of *galette* in the store-room, where he is waiting.'

Aline put a black lace veil on her head, and went there. She held out her hand to the young man, and said:

'The priest is here. Madeleine will let you know when all is ready. I am sure that you would rather die than betray him.'

'You may be certain of that, citoyenne.'

'Will you call me Aline, not citoyenne? I like it better.'

'And will you call me Hypolite?'

'Yes,' she answered; and then, joined by Mother Chozière, Madeleine, and poor Pierre, who had hovered about her all day like a faithful and anxious dog, whose instinct tells him something sad is going on, they went into the barn. It was quite dark, but for two thin candles on the altar. Aline retired into a corner of the building, and went to confession to the abbé — spent afterwards a few instants in prayer, then looked up, and said to Madeleine:

'I am ready; will you tell him so?'

She did not look up when Hypolite came in. Mass began. Two straw Prie Dieus were placed before the table, which served as an altar. She went and knelt on one of them, and an instant afterwards Hypolite was by her side. It was the first time for some years that he had knelt. He hid his face in his hands: Mass went on—the nuptial rite was performed

—it ended—the candles were extinguished, all but the one Madeleine held in her hand—the priest disappeared.

Aline's face had a singular expression when she rose from her knees. Mother Chozière said that the words 'Consummatum est' seemed written upon it, and that she felt impelled to say, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend her.'

When she returned to the cottage, Hypolite walked beside Aline. His horse was tied to a post near the garden-gate. She said to him:

'At what o'clock am I to meet you at the Mairie?'

'At eleven,' he said; 'but will you come first to our house?'

She assented, and gave him her hand. He said, 'May I kiss you?'

The blood rushed to her head; it throbbed with the violence of the effort she made to submit to that kiss, but she did so, and he whispered:

'Aline, I am glad you asked to be married

here: you are now bound to me for ever.'

Yes; the deed was done — the chain riveted. The future she dared not think of, and she dreaded dwelling on the past; there was nothing but the present, the terrible present, to live in hour by hour.

On the following morning, instead of a black gown, Aline took out of her box a white dress Mdlle. de Marsoulier had given her. Madeleine could not restrain her tears whilst she helped her to put it on. There was something in her composure more affecting than in any great bursts of grief. Aline only broke down once. She pressed her forehead on Madeleine's shoulder, and said:

'It is strange to feel glad that my poor father is dead.'

A carriage came to fetch them; and at half-past ten they arrived at Parcin's house. Some of his relatives were assembled in the salon. He came forward and presented a bouquet to Aline. It was composed of white, red, and blue flowers, the colours

of the Republic. She bent her head, and accepted it; beginning to practise the rule that, on her knees the night before, she had laid down for herself—submission to every compliance, however repugnant, that did not involve sin.

The ceremony at the Mairie was short—to Aline utterly insignificant. More dead than alive, she was conveyed to Parcin's house to begin her new life. Hypolite met her at the door, and led her to her apartment.

'Your brothers are gone?' he said.

'Yes,' she said; 'the contract is fulfilled.'

'And you abhor its conditions?'

She answered: 'I feel very weak and tired, Hypolite; and you must be satisfied with a very few words from me at this moment. The less we revert to the past, the better will it be for both of us. I do not hate you. I fully believe that you would not have compelled me to marry you by pointing a dagger at my breast. I know it was your father's doing. Had you refused to marry me, my brothers would have perished. I have, there-

fore, reason to be grateful to you. Accept that assurance, and press me no further. Every duty that a husband has a right to claim from a wife I will try to perform; and I will obey you in everything my conscience does not forbid.'

'All that is very fine, but I want you to love me. Don't you know that I adore you?'

Aline involuntarily shuddered. He perceived it, and an expression of anger passed over his face.

'Oh, I suppose that the love of a patriot and a republican excites your aversion. I wish you had been born on a dunghill; as it is, you might feel some gratitude that I did not scorn to marry, however well dowered, the child of vile aristocrats.'

'This, then,' Aline thought, 'is a specimen of what I am about to endure. O my God, spare me and strengthen me!'

She fell back in the arm-chair on which she was seated—looking so like death that Hypolite felt frightened. He called Made-

leine, who was in the next room. She came, and begged him to let Aline rest awhile. And when he was gone, the poor girl fell into her arms, weeping bitterly. This did her good. Madeleine carried rather than led her to a sofa in her bedroom. The housekeeper, a good-natured old soul, came to offer her services to the bride. By the evening, Aline was very ill, and in the night light-headed. Her husband, in despair, fetched a doctor and brought a nurse, who providentially turned out to be a Sister of Charity in a secular dress. This enabled Madeleine to go home, where she was urgently wanted.

Hypolite stood watching his wife, and listening to the words which fell from her lips in her delirium. He heard her say:

'Oh, do not touch me with those hands dripping with blood!'

And another time: 'Take away that glass; I cannot—I will not drink it! See, it is full of blood!'

She was doubtless haunted in her dreams

by the story of Mdlle. de Sombreuil, who was made to ransom her aged father by drinking, in blood, the health of the Republic.

For the first time, Hypolite felt a sense of disgust come over him at the part he had taken in the massacres and executions which had followed the conquest of Lyons. The passion he felt for the innocent girl forced to become his wife, and in her dreams crying out against him as an assassin, awoke dormant feelings in his soul. When she recovered thought and consciousness, he treated her gently; brought her flowers, took her to drive in the woods outside the city, or to see Madeleine at Fontaine. His manners were coarse, and, if angry, he easily became brutal; but to her he was, generally speaking, kind. She behaved to him with unvarying gentleness, and carefully repressed every impulse to show him scorn and dislike.

The meals and other times when she was obliged to associate with her father-in-

law were to her occasions of intense suffering. The members of the Committee and the leading Jacobins formed the chief part of the society at his house. She had to listen to conversations which chilled the blood in her veins. Parcin was apt to resent her silence on these occasions, and sometimes called upon her to express patriotic sentiments. But even he was softened by her patience and gentleness, and noticing that she turned pale when executions were spoken of, he began to avoid mentioning them before her. On the first Sunday after her marriage, she went out alone at a very early hour, and repaired on foot to a house where she knew Mass was always said.

'Where have you been?' Hypolite asked, when she returned.

'To Mass,' she answered.

'Where?'

'I cannot tell you.'

'Why?'

'Because I promised secrecy.'

'My father would be furious if he knew it.'

'He need not know it.'

'You should give up your superstitions, Aline. They are unworthy the wife of a patriot. The worship of Reason is the only rational religion.'

'Even Robespierre has given up that delusion,' Aline answered; and then, changing the subject, she asked him if he would procure for her an order to enter the prisons.

'What for?'

'To speak words of consolation to the unfortunate prisoners.'

'Can I be sure that your object is not to conspire with them? You hate the Republic, and wish well to her enemies.'

'I give you my word of honour that I have no other object than to relieve their sufferings. Do, Hypolite, afford me that happiness.'

Her manner was, for the first time, caressing.

'You little witch!' he exclaimed—'you siren! It is a horrid thing to be in love with a woman, and especially one's own wife.

Brutus himself would have been unmanned by such a pair of eyes as yours. I shall see what I can do. But take care my father does not catch you at it. He is absent just now. Corchant may perhaps give you an order.'

The order was obtained, and Aline began her mission of mercy in the prisons, which were more full than ever at that moment. The Reign of Terror had reached its height; the members of the Committee seemed possessed with a madness which craved incessantly for new victims. There was not room enough for the daily increasing number of captives. The unhappy prisoners became so familiar with the thought of death, that those who did not meet it with a sublime resignation did so with a stolid indifference. Aline became accustomed to speak without overwhelming emotion to persons who were doomed to die or expecting their sentence. She went about like an angel of mercy amongst them, and obtained the release of a few. Children were often incarcerated with their parents, and sometimes condemned to death without

investigation. She drew attention to these cases, and procured their deliverance. Several young creatures were thus saved, and placed in cottages near Castel St. Guy. Vaubon was residing there, and aided her to arrange this. His pity for Aline seemed sincere. He and Parcin had disputes about her property. It was to visit it that the latter had absented himself.

He returned elated with the knowledge of the value of his daughter-in-law's estates, which had greatly exceeded his expectations. To see him in high spirits, considering the business he was every day engaged in, was the hardest trial of all. She tried not to think of it; but when sitting at dinner opposite to him, the idea of it pursued her and also the remembrance of the day when she had followed him in the street, beseeching him to save the life of her aunt Félicie, and that he had roughly repulsed and shaken her off.

One evening he noticed that she looked more preoccupied than usual. The fact was

that she had received a note announcing the arrival of her brothers at Lausanne. They were just setting off for the head-quarters of the Princes, and begged her to write to them there. This had been a great consolation, but then it involved the necessity of letting them know the price she had paid for their lives. The prospect of making this announcement to them weighed like lead on her heart. She was so absorbed by this thought that Parcin had to raise his voice to make her attend to him.

'Citoyenne,' he said, 'a great honour has been awarded you. At the festival on the next Décade, there is to be a grand procession, in which I have promised that you will personate the Goddess of Reason. Your sage demeanour will be quite in character with your part. I have brought you from Castel St. Guy your aunt's jewels. She never imagined that they would figure at a Republican ceremony.'

Aline blushed deeply, and said: 'You must excuse me from accepting this offer.

I cannot, I assure you, thus appear in public.'

'You must,' Parcin said, with a frown; 'I have promised for you, and not without a sufficient reason. It is rumoured that you are not as good a patriot as my son's wife should be, and it is proper that, by a public civic demonstration, you should clear yourself of this suspicion. This is a good opportunity, and I insist on your fulfilling the part assigned to you.'

Aline's eyes flashed. She drew herself up to the height of her slight figure, and said:

'I shall not appear in that character.'

'You shall. Remember that a true patriot holds nothing sacred and dear in comparison with the Republic, and though Hypolite may be enslaved by your charms, I am not equally subjugated; and if I suspected you of reactionary sentiments, I would send you to-morrow to the scaffold.'

Hypolite, who had been silent up to that moment, struck the table with his fist so violently that everything upon it rattled.

'If you did so,' he cried, in a voice hoarse with passion, 'you would send your son to it likewise; but not before he had run a dagger into your breast.'

Aline joined her hands and exclaimed:

'Hypolite, down on your knees! Ask your father to forgive those words. You did not, you could not, mean what you said.'

Hypolite stood sullenly silent, with his arms folded. Parcin seemed cut to the heart. There was but one being he loved on earth—and that was his son. It seems strange that this one strong human affection should have existed in so hard a heart, but it was so; and to have heard Hypolite threaten to kill him, had given him for a moment a degree of anguish such as he daily caused to others. He turned to Aline with a bitter smile, and said:

'My son never threatened my life till he had married an aristocrat. Would madame condescend to conform to my wishes if she could, in return, liberate a score of guilty

ci-devants, who deserve to die for their sympathy with the abominations of royalty, but are harmless enough as far as the Republic is concerned ?'

Poor Aline ! What a choice was again set before her ! What a mental torture inflicted ! But it did not last long. With an oath, Hypolite burst forth :

'My wife shall not personate a goddess. She shall not be promenaded before the eyes of the multitude to be stared at and cheered like an actress. No ; not if she could thus save every ci-devant and empty every prison in Lyons. I am sorry, father, for what I said to you ; but remember what you said to her. Do you think I have no feelings, and could hear you speak of sending her to the scaffold without hating you ?'

'You idiot !' Parcin fiercely exclaimed. 'Did you not perceive that I was threatening that foolish child, as your nurse used to frighten you with the loup-garou ? Come, we have had enough of this. I have to go to the Tribunal, not in a good humour, I

promise you, with aristocrats and their admirers.'

This scene was but one of those which Aline had to go through during the first weeks of her married life. She discerned some traces of good feeling in her husband, but they were few and far between. The want of principle, the brutalising effect of association with men worse than himself, the readiness to attack everything holy and good —all she revered and valued—when he was irritated with her, were much more conspicuous than the occasional evidences of a heart not wholly corrupted. What she desired was to withdraw him and herself from his father's house, and to go and live at Castel St. Guy, with or without Vaubon, but far from the influences which she never could hope to counterbalance in Lyons.

She was sitting one morning in her room writing a letter to her brothers; she knew not when or how it could go, but thought of sending it to Vaubon to forward. It began thus:

'DEAR MAURICE AND DEAR ANDRÉ,

'I received your note from Lausanne. The knowledge of your safety has probably been my last great joy on earth. You will imagine, when I say this, that I am dying. I wish I were, and sometimes I think that my life will soon end. I should be so glad. But you must think of me as of one dead. I am married, not because I willed or wished it, but because I was obliged. It is a repulsive, a very sad marriage I have made, but not a disgraceful one. I would not tell you why I consented to it, if it were not that, though it will give you intense pain, it will be a better pain than to think that of her own accord and unconstrained by her deep love for you both, your sister became the wife of one of those deluded and miserable men who, in the name of Liberty, commit, alas! so many crimes. Dear, darling brothers, my marriage to Hypolite Parcin, the son of the President of the Revolutionary Tribunal, was the price of your deliverance. Forgive me, my brave

Maurice, my own André, that I had not courage enough to refuse to pay it, to let you die. I do not regret it. Oh no! I daily thank God that, even thus, I have been permitted to be, what you used to call me, my André, your angel guardian. Do not let your thoughts dwell on me. Let me know about yourselves. Direct your letters to Castel St. Guy, to Vaubon's care. Dear brothers, make much of your lives so dearly purchased! Let every instant of them count for eternity. This much I will tell you, the man I have married loves me; and if in the insanity of his delusion he is cruel to others, he is not so to me.' . . . .

She had written so far, when the old housekeeper, who was devoted to her, entered the room. Aline looked up, and saw that she was violently agitated.

'What is the matter?' she said, putting down her pen.

'Oh, such news, citoyenne—such awful news!'

'What?'

'Robespierre is dead—guillotined—and ever so many of his friends. People are crying it in the streets. There! don't you hear them? And they say that a commissary is coming from Paris to upset everything. They have stopped all the executions that were to have taken place to-day. Just now a cart full of prisoners was on its way to the Place des Terraux. A crowd stopped it, and by force delivered them. The town is in a regular uproar. Listen,' she said, going to the window, and opening it. 'Listen! they are crying out—à bas Parcin!'

Aline, with a beating heart, looked out. It was true—the crowd was shouting:

'Down with the Parcins! Down with the Temporary Committee! Down with the Terror! Long live Clemency!'

Their yells as they passed the house were terrible. Stones were thrown at the windows. She anxiously expected Hypolite's return. Her mind was on the full stretch—her excitement painful. She walked up and down

the room to relieve the tension of her nerves. Again the shouts began. She returned to the window. Her father-in-law was walking up the street, surrounded by a crowd of persons yelling and hooting. He was looking as pale as death. Before reaching his house, he suddenly darted into a side-street, and entered by the back-door, which he locked. She went down to the drawing-room, and found him nearly fainting. She got him some wine, and hastily closed the shutters on the side of the street.

'Where is Hypolite?' she asked.

'I do not know,' he answered gloomily, and wrung his hands.

Before long his son came in. He, too, had met with rough treatment. When alone with Aline, he said:

'It is all up with us. Letters have come which say that the defenders of the Republic will be hunted down and crushed by the murderers of Robespierre. All we have done in behalf of the nation will be turned against us. For my part, if the prospect becomes

desperate, I shall make short work of my own life. I shall rid you of your husband. I suppose I could do nothing that would please you so much.'

'It would cause me grief and horror,' she replied. 'If you think you are in danger, why not leave Lyons at once? Let us escape to Castel St. Guy.'

'We are watched. There are spies all round the house. They are expecting orders from Paris. It is reported that they have arrived. The reactionists are joining with faint-hearted Republicans. They are breaking open the doors of the prisons. They are threatening our lives, ungrateful wretches! . . . . If we have shed blood, was it not for the sake of the nation? Where would the Republic be but for the men they have murdered? But I beg your pardon; I forgot that you are rejoicing over their deaths, and the prospect that we shall soon share their fate.'

Aline's heart was in a strange tumult; the thought of the opening of the prisons, the deliverance of so many innocent beings, would

have flooded it with joy, but for the horror she felt at the impending doom of one to whom she was so fatally, but so strongly, bound. She would fain have said to him words of hope and comfort, but the bitter spirit in which he spoke froze them on her lips: a terrible sense that the retribution hanging over him was deserved, seemed to paralyse her. But, above all, the fear that he would destroy himself made her almost long for the dread suspense to be over. She determined not to lose sight of him. She could not speak much, but during a moment when he seemed calmer she took his hand and held it in her own. Then burst forth the pent-up agony of his soul.

'Oh, little creature!' he cried, 'whom from the first day that I saw you I would have died to make my own; whom I allowed to be tortured into marrying me; whom I worshipped with the terrible consciousness that you hated me—it is the eternal parting with you that appals me.'

'I do not hate you, Hypolite. Oh no—

from the hour when we stood before the altar of God, the temptation to do so passed away from me. And now make me a promise—whatever happens, do not attempt your own life.'

'You would rather I should die on the scaffold. You think I deserve no other death.'

'That was not what I meant, but if you dread to be eternally separated from me do not commit suicide. I do not wish to be for ever parted from you.'

He laughed bitterly, and said, 'In the heaven you dream of you will put up with my companionship, so that in this world you see me no more!'

Whatever she uttered, he in this way turned to gall and bitterness. She could not say she loved him, and that was what he craved for.

Parcin came into her room to look for Hypolite. He betrayed no agitation. There was a stolidity in his features contrasting strongly with his son's wild expression of countenance. He sat down, and said:

'We are hemmed in. The commissary of the Convention is on his way here.'

Aline stood between the father and the son, unable to speak. Violent cheers, mingled with vociferations against the Terrorists, resounded in the street. A civic guard surrounded the house. A knock at the door was heard. The shouting was hushed. Parcin rose, looked out of the window, and said :

'It is the commissary !'

A dead silence ensued. Then the knocking at the door began again. Hypolite walked out of the room almost beside himself. Parcin approached Aline, and said :

'Promise me to save him if you can—my boy, my only one !'

She laid her hand on his arm—that arm she had vainly clung to in her hour of despair.

'God is my witness that nothing that a woman can do shall I leave undone to save my husband !'

Tears ran down the cheeks of the Terrorist: he stooped and kissed her forehead. An instant afterwards the father and son were arrested, handcuffed, and on their way to Paris—to be tried for the slaughter of their fellow-citizens.

Aline did not pause or hesitate; she went that very day to Castel St. Guy, and informed Vaubon of what had happened. He was much affected by the unexpected news, and deeply touched when Aline proposed that they should both instantly proceed to Paris to be near Hypolite.

'But where will you lodge?' he asked.

She said that she would first stop at an hotel with him, and, in the meantime, procure letters of introduction from some of her friends in Lyons — to ladies in Paris who would be likely to befriend her.

For that purpose she wrote to Mdme. de Vergy, who recommended her strongly to Mdlle. Elisabeth de Marconnay. She knew that Hypolite Parcin's wife, even to those acquainted with her story, would not be in

some cases a welcome visitor, nor be inclined to assist her efforts for her husband's release; but Elisabeth de Marconnay was one of those few persons who did not mix up religion and charity with party-spirit, and ministered to sufferers of all sorts. As was said before, she maintained a friendly intercourse with Robespierre, and was personally acquainted with many of the Montagnards. In her intercourse with people of every position, every party, every character, during those strange and terrible years, she had acquired the conviction, that good is often found lurking in the recesses of a heart which might have been supposed to be totally hardened. Few men are thoroughly and avowedly wicked. Self-deception blinds them to the nature of even the most atrocious acts. This had taught her never to despair of anyone. The breadth of her sympathies was well known, and it secured her friends in every camp. When the persecutor of the previous day became on the morrow the victim of persecution, she was

always ready to protect, to assist, to defend him. 'No one could have been found more able or more willing to befriend Aline at that moment of her life.

END OF VOL. II.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS AND ELECTROTYPERS, GUILDFORD.
S. & H.

BOOKS FOR THE COUNTRY AND SEASIDE.

BENTLEYS' FAVOURITE NOVELS,

Each volume can be obtained separately of any bookseller in town or country, in crown 8vo., cloth, 6s.

NEW ADDITIONS TO THE SERIES.

SECOND THOUGHTS, by **Miss Broughton.**

JOHNNY LUDLOW { SECOND SERIES. } by **Mrs. Henry Wood.**

THE MYSTERY IN PALACE GARDENS, by **Mrs. J. H. Riddell.**

ADAM AND EVE, by **Mrs. Parr.**

THE WELLFIELDS, by **Miss Fothergill.**

NO RELATIONS, by **Hector Malot.**

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

This book is **DUE** on the last date stamped below

Form L-9–35*m*-8,'28

PR
4708 Fullerton -
F7w A will and
v.2 a way.

Delayed Paging

PR
4708
F7w
v.2

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 373 739 2